MODERN WICCA

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Chapter One

Introduction

Under the glow of the full moon on Friday, October 13, 2000, six women, including me, met at a Mexican restaurant in northern Indiana for dinner. The women ranged in age between twenty-three and forty-one. They were all white and dressed casually but well. The women greeted each other warmly. My hostess introduced me to the group and explained that I was present to gather research. I was welcomed and encouraged to participate in the evening's activities. Once they were seated, the women passed around a candleholder and a green candle. Each person held the items briefly and silently imprinted her hopes for the evening onto the objects. The candle was then placed into the holder on the middle of the table and lit. Despite the fact that we were in a public atmosphere, the group did not seem self-conscious about their activities. As the women ordered food and ate, the atmosphere was festive. The joking and laughter were interspersed between serious conversations about families, careers, and classes. They clearly knew each other well.

One of the women had a serious decision to make regarding her education, so she "brought it to the circle." Her professor at school had informed the class that if they wanted to turn their papers back in for a higher grade, they could. Should she do it? She described her dilemma in detail, and then each of the others gave her thoughts on what the woman should do. All of the women believed that "taking something to the circle"

made it easier for them to make informed decisions in their lives. Together they held more power than they did individually.

After the dinner concluded, the women proceeded on a "spirit hunt," the main purpose of the evening's festivities. The women believed that they could make contact with the spiritual world, and so they were "hunting" spirits with which to communicate. As Wiccans consider the thirteenth of the month an "eerie" date when it is in conjunction with the full moon, the timing for their jaunt was propitious. The older building where the restaurant was located and where the women had eaten was reputed to have experienced poltergeist activities. With the owner's permission, the women went upstairs, which was closed off to other patrons, and investigated each room for possible spirits. Several women reported either feeling "cold spots," feeling a presence, or actually seeing spirits. The group concluded that the building was definitely haunted.

Leaving the restaurant, the women traveled outside of town to a cornfield. The cornfield along with an adjacent house had once belonged to Rose Winter, a locally acclaimed psychic. The women felt it would be easier for them to reach the deceased Rose because in life she had been open to psychic vibrations. The women formed into a circle and joined hands.

One of the women tentatively said, "I'm going to just make up a chant to get us started."

She was answered by one of the other women who replied, "That's good. Just do what feels right."

Soon, all of the women had joined in chanting, "Peace, love, and divination."

The woman who had begun the chant now intoned, "Rose Winter, Rose Winter give us a sign of your presence!"

At that moment, two dogs came racing across the empty cornfield. The circle broke apart as the women scattered. The women would look back and call this "spirit hunt" a success, claiming that the dogs were the sign of the spirit (In reality, the dogs had been set loose by the current owners of the property).

These women are Wiccans. As such, they are part of a growing counter cultural movement in North America. Wicca was described by Simms (2000), a Wiccan, as a gentle nature religion that incorporates magic into its practices. Wicca is a religion which addresses spiritual needs that are relevant to a particular segment of American society today.

Two hundred years ago, Comte predicted that religion would disappear and be replaced by sociology. As industrialization advanced, other sociologists predicted the demise of religion as education and scientific knowledge increased. Yet, here we are in the 21st century, in one of the most industrialized countries in the world, and religion is far from disappearing. Additionally, a largely well-educated segment of North American society is reviving and reinventing a very old religion, Witchcraft, a religion that has its roots in pre-industrial agricultural societies, and finding that it suits the "modern" situation quite well. As part of the reviving and reinventing process, modern Witchcraft has come to be known more popularly as Wicca.

One of the intriguing aspects about Wicca that appears to set it apart from other, more traditional North American religions is that individualism plays a very important role. Many Wiccans stress that this individualism should include the construction of new and highly individualistic beliefs and practices that are unique to the individual Wiccan or to the local coven. Like the Wiccans I observed in the cornfield who decided to "make up" an incantation on the spot, some Wiccans place a high value on the ability to make up spiritual beliefs and practices when they need or want them. It is a very playful, spontaneous, and inventive religion; however, the strong strain of individualism leads to organizational problems for Wicca as a whole. Who will decide what beliefs are right and which are wrong? Is anyone or should anyone be in a position to rule on what Wicca is and what it is not? Is anyone or should anyone be in a position to discipline persons or groups who are giving Wicca a negative reputation? If everyone is so individualistic, is it possible for Wiccans to act in a collective or coordinated manner to respond to challenges or achieve common goals? In short, if Wicca is so individualistic, will it lack the organizational strength to achieve collective goals, attract new followers, and pass on its traditions to the next generation? Is there sufficient unity for them to be a community?

In this thesis, I examine these issues in the light of sociological theories of religion and find Wiccans do have a viable community that can act collectively. I conducted direct research by gaining admittance to a local coven and to two on-line covens, which are closed to the general public. In order to gain admittance, I had to be

approved. The on-line coven requested that I answer questions concerning my race, sex, age, level of education, religious preference and reasons for wishing to join. I was allowed into the local coven because of contacts I developed in the academic community. The leader of this particular group is a classmate of mine, and we had come to know each other well though various classes. However, each member of the group also had to agree to my presence in order for me to be able to observe them. Both on-line and in person, I informed Wiccans of my research and stressed that I was not a member of their religion. To protect Wiccans' anonymity, I have used pseudonyms for all the Wiccans who participated in the study. The use of anonymity was crucial to my research as the practitioners of Wicca have been routinely persecuted up to the present age, even in America. In addition, I had to agree not to report certain activities to ensure the Wiccans' cooperation. Wicca is a cautious and rather secretive group. Subsequently, there is little description of actual observation in the scientific literature by non-Wiccans. By examining Wicca's historical background, Wiccan beliefs, the divisions in modern Wicca and the struggles over moral authority, I will demonstrate how the community is able to act collectively and continue to flourish in our modern age.

Chapter Two

The Witchcraft Revival

Cultural factors behind the revival

Throughout history, Witches, or individuals who were believed to have supernatural powers, have been present in all cultures (Brain, 1997, p. 192; Gardner, 1954, p. 331), and they were continually persecuted or venerated world wide until the Age of the Enlightenment of the 18th century, when the educated elite no longer credited Witches with having "magical" powers (Hutton, 1999, p. 132). Gradually, Witches, or the belief in them, were viewed as passé by the educated segments of society; however, in the 20th century, Witches began to receive more attention. Many cultural forces such as industrialization, urbanization, exposure to other cultures' beliefs, feminism, alienation, rationalization and secularism led to the growth of modern Wicca.

Elements that would later be combined into modern Wicca began to emerge long before the 20th century. In the 16th century, Eastern thought such as a belief in reincarnation began to penetrate into Western culture (Hutton, 1999, p. 5). In 1744, Emanuel Swedenborg officially founded Spiritualism, a belief that people could communicate with the souls of the deceased. A movement that had much in common with contemporary New Age movements emerged, but Spiritualism did not become popular with mainstream culture at that time (Carroll, 1997, pp. 17-18).

In the mid-1800s, Spiritualism in the United States began attracting thousands of adherents due to the influence of two women. Catherine and Margaretta Fox, sisters, lived in Hydesville, New York. They devised a method in 1848 for communicating with the spirit that they believed was haunting their family's home. Many people were galvanized into witnessing the experience for themselves, and they arrived in great crowds at the Fox's home. The Fox sisters began touring to promote Spiritualism, and by 1855, claims were made that Spiritualism had over two million followers (http://religious movements.lib.Virginia.edu/nrms/spiritsm.html). The claim is believable because the framework of Spiritualism immediately attracted large numbers of women. Many women found the religion appealing, as they had traditionally been denied any types of leadership roles in the patriarchal religions of Christianity and Judaism (Carroll, 1997, p. 57).

In 1889, folklorist Charles Leland (1824-1903) published Aradia in America that would later contribute a great deal to the Witchcraft revival. Aradia, also known as The Gospel of the Witches, supposedly set out the tenets of Witchcraft which had been handed down and given to him by an Etruscan hereditary Witch named Magdalena (Leland, 2001). It is important to note, however, that Leland never provided any documentation to validate his work. Leland was a folklorist and may have viewed Aradia as a folk tale. While scholars have not taken his work seriously (Adler, 1986, p. 56; Guiley, 1999, p. 200; Hutton, 1999, p. 147), many of his tenets have been

encapsulated into Wicca such as "The Charge of the Goddess," which is commonly invoked during Wiccan ritual (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, p. 46).

As time passed, industrialization and urbanization brought with them their own conditions and consequences that many of the educated elite found repugnant. Poets such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821) of the Romantic Period (1798-1832) in England idealized a more pastoral form of life. In America, the Transcendentalists, including Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), were also seeking a spirituality imbued with nature.

The Progressive Era (1860-1920) gave rise to secret societies and open clubs in response to the increasing alienation that accompanied industrialization and urbanization. Woloch (2000) reports that societies and clubs became commonplace for the middle class of America (p. 276); and, according to Hutton (1999), a historian at the University of Bristol, these societies became the norm for England's middle class as well (p. 64). These associations, such as the Freemasons, were often shrouded in secrecy and boasted of secret knowledge that had been handed down through the centuries (Hutton, 1999, p. 72).

In 1922, Aleister Crowley, a magician, accepted the leadership of the Ordo Templi Orientis, yet another secret society that was to impact the Witchcraft revival in two ways. Crowley was a prolific author who penned such works as The Book of the Law in 1904. The book proclaimed the Law of Thelema: " 'Do what thou wilt shall be

the whole of the law'" (Guiley, 1999, p. 72), which would become one of Wicca's major tenets. In the process of his career, Crowley, who was reviled by many people, did bring magic to public awareness at a greater level than ever before his time.

Another contributor to the revival was the feminist movement. Woloch (2000) notes that once the vote was gained by women in America in 1920, women pushed for further gains. Women pushed for an Equal Rights Amendment and the sexual revolution began. For the first time, women's sexuality came to be viewed as healthy and was promoted (Woloch, 2000, p. 389). Gardner would later encapsulate the new viewpoint of women into the Witchcraft revival by providing equality to women and open sexuality.

Another powerful motivation for the revival is found in the progress and increasing influence of science. As more and more people were becoming educated and more breakthroughs were made in science, Christianity was thought to be failing by a segment of the educated elite (Hutton, 1999, p. 207). The breakdown can be clearly seen in the case of Tennessee V. John Scopes. Scopes was a science teacher who attempted to teach Darwin's theory of evolution in a public high school in 1925. Immediately, the fundamentalist religious segment in America responded by prosecuting Scopes in a public court of law for his behavior. While evolution did not come out the victor in the trials, creationism received some very public punches. As Alfred North Whitehead claimed in 1930, "When we consider what religion is for mankind, and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of

history depends upon the decision of this generation as to the relations between them" (Herndon, 2001). Many sociologists believed that secularization would mean the end of religion, but Gerald Gardner found a way to bridge the gap between religion and science.

Gerald Gardner

Despite the fact that the same cultural forces were at work in both the United States and England, Hutton (1999) and Berger (1999) conclude that the Witchcraft revival began with Gerald Gardner (1886-1964) in England. When England repealed the law against Witchcraft in 1951, the sixty-seven year old Gardner formed his own coven and went public with the religion (Guiley, 1999, p. 134). He publicly declared that the religion had remained active in secret practice and had never really died out despite a tremendous effort to eradicate its practice by practitioners of Judeo-Christianity. Anthropologist Margaret Murray, who was a pioneer in the research of Witch cults, supported him in his claims. Murray (1921) theorized, "Modern Witchcraft is the surviving remnant of organized Pagan religion which existed during the Witch hunts" (in Guiley, 1989, p. 134). Many academics no longer believe in all of Murray's research results (Berger, 1999, p. 21), but at the time it did lend credibility to Gardner's claim of a revival. Murray wrote the introduction to Gardner's (1954) book Witchcraft Today, which elaborated on Murray's own work.

The history of the Witchcraft revival is difficult to trace due to the elusiveness and misdirection perpetrated by Gardner, the father of modern Witchcraft. As Hutton (1999) describes, Gardner was no stranger to "secret" societies. He was a member of the Folklore Society, the Circle of the Universal Bond known as the Ancient Druid Order, and the Ordo Templi Orientis, which provided him with links to magician Crowley (p. 224). Perhaps because of the mythology around these groups and the secrecy surrounding the Circle of the Universal Bond as well as the Ordo Templi Orientis, Gardner had little trouble weaving myth and reality together; therefore, common myths must be deciphered to arrive at any credible understanding of the history. The very secrecy of the groups added an extra inducement for members. It enabled members to feel a sense of superiority as many of the societies claimed to have secret knowledge that had been passed down for years, and may indicate why Gardner insisted on secrecy within his own movement. Researchers such as Hutton (1999) believe that without the secrecy, it would have immediately become obvious that much of the history of the movement was fabricated, as in many other secret societies of the time (p. 208). The deliberate secrecy on Gardner's part concealed his new religious movement's lack of a past.

The biggest "myth" concerning the revival would be how Gardner became a Witch, but it was a necessary myth to provide a history for his new religious movement. As the myth unfolds, what has become known as the Witchcraft revival began in 1939, when Gardner was initiated into a coven of hereditary Witches who had secretly handed

down their practices. He was allegedly initiated into a coven by Dorothy Clutterbuck (1880-1951), the coven's high priestess (Guiley, 1999, p. 134; Hutton, 1999, p. 206).

As Hutton (1999) points out, the possibility of Clutterbuck initiating Gardner into a hereditary Witches' coven is extremely slim. She did indeed exist, but in all probability she was not a Witch. Born to Thomas and Ellen Clutterbuck, Dorothy matured to marry Rupert Fordham and became a leading figure in British society. She was a Tory, a very conservative political party. In addition, Clutterbuck's diaries reveal her to be a pious Christian, and none of the diaries make any allusions to Witchcraft. When Gardner claimed Clutterbuck initiated him into the coven, her husband had just died and mourning customs of the day would have consumed her time. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that Clutterbuck and Gardner did not even meet (pp. 206-211).

While the historical evidence strongly suggests that Clutterbuck did not have anything to do with either Witchcraft or Gardner, there are a few tendrils in the snarl of her history that are suggestive. Hutton (1999) reports that Clutterbuck was a member of two organizations that he believed had some links with Paganism: the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts; however, it should be noted that while these groups proposed closer affinity with nature, they also promoted the one God of the larger, mainstream Christianity (p. 210). A more intriguing fact presented itself when it became known that Fordham and Clutterbuck were never legally married. Apparently, Fordham already had a wife, although she was rumored to be insane. When Fordham died, Clutterbuck lost

his estate when his relatives contested the will. Since Clutterbuck was not above deceit herself, or at least willing to overlook cultural norms, the myth does seem to still be open to speculation. The only conclusive proof must rest with Clutterbuck's diaries, and Hutton (1999) asserted the notion that she was not part of Gardner's world based on her own writings (p. 211). However, Clutterbuck, who would have been engaging in an illegal activity before 1951, might have been unwilling to document any involvement in a coven. The truth behind the myth may never be fully revealed, but the evidence strongly suggests that Clutterbuck was neither a Witch nor Gardner's high priestess. In modern Wicca, Gardner's claim is still hotly debated because some Wiccans need and desire historical links in order to legitimize their religion.

The figure of Clutterbuck was extremely important for the development and continuation of Gardner's new religious movement. She provided a link between the past and the present; thus, Clutterbuck became the bridge fusing the past and the present of the religion (Hutton, 1999, p. 212). This was one of the methods Gardner used to legitimize his religious movement and provide a background for the movement. It enabled Gardner to underline the unbroken chain of the religion and at the same time to make a claim for hereditary Witches, which he promoted to further the same cause.

There does exist some historical evidence that Gardner was initiated into a coven, but by a woman he only identified as Dafo, who did work with Gardner as his high priestess. It could be, as Hutton (1999) speculates, that Gardner used Clutterbuck to protect the real identity of his high priestess. Since Dafo never went public regarding

the Witchcraft religion, even going so far as to remove herself when Gardner began to publicize the religion, it could, in fact, have some basis in truth (pp. 212-214). When Dafo removed herself from Gardner's movement, new initiate Doreen Valiente, considered the mother of modern Witchcraft, became Gardner's high priestess. Gardner, in true form, presented Valiente as a hereditary Witch, with Valiente willingly colluding and adding to the myth (Hutton, 1999, p. 246).

Again, facts outweigh the myths Gardner built around his religious movement. Hutton (1999) believes that the truth of hereditary Witchcraft depends upon the interpretation of three different groups as reflected in history: Cunning people, Charmers and Witches. Hutton defined each group so each is separate and apart from the others. Cunning people were those who practiced magic. Charmers were those who only worked with a single technique, usually concerned with healing. He categorized Witches as those beings who had given themselves over to evil. Hutton clearly points out that the talent of Cunning people was not hereditary, and neither was the talent of the Charmer, although the actual charm/spell could be passed down. He believes Witches, however, gained the hereditary reputation because of "a side-effect of the simple phenomenon that certain families who had a bad local reputation in general were rumored to dabble in Witchcraft as well as other sorts of anti-social behavior" (p. 104). Hutton elaborates that it was more commonly believed that the Witch had to pass her power on because it was personal (p. 104).

However scholars choose to define the terms, some modern Wiccans act as if there is an unbroken line. Again, this provides the historical framework of the religion and is necessary since some Wiccans would be uncomfortable with a religion others might view as created and therefore not as legitimate as other religious beliefs. Right from the beginning, Gardner advocated the Thomas Theorem: if we say we believe in something, and it has consequences, then it becomes a reality (Thomas in Janowitz, 1966).

Gardner created many aspects of the new religion in conjunction with Doreen Valiente. Since Murray's (1921) work reported that only a remnant of the Witchcraft religion had survived, Gardner felt that the Pagan religion was incomplete; consequently, he added to the religion by choosing aspects of other religions to incorporate into Witchcraft, a practice reflecting Bibby's (1987) theory of religion a la carte, "a belief here, a practice there" (p. 264). Gardner also felt free to create rituals as he went along. As Gardner burned his personal papers, it is through his Book of Shadows that the liturgy of the Witch is known (Guiley, 1999, p. 135). The high priestess Valiente edited and created many of the rituals for Gardner's book as well. She is most well known for having rewritten "The Charge" which along with "The Wiccan Rede" has become a creed for the religion. "The Charge" is a derivation from Robert Graves' The White Goddess published in 1948 and Leland's Aradia. Graves' fictional masterpiece popularized the Goddess and promoted the ideal of an ancient matriarchy (Hutton, 1999, pp. 188-191). Valiente distilled Graves' prose into "The Charge,"

creating and editing to reflect her beliefs regarding Witchcraft. Leland's folk tale provided a link to supposed Witches actually using "The Charge." Gardner encouraged such creativity in all of his converts, and this promoted a very fluid framework for the religion, allowing it to adapt. Gardner felt that "Wiccan initiates should not merely copy the existing rituals and statements of belief but alter and add to them according to their own tastes and abilities" (Hutton, 1999, p. 248).

A New Religious Movement

A Witch from the past would not recognize Gardner's version because it was not the Witchcraft of the past, although it was labeled as a revival. Gardner's Witchcraft was highly individualized by tailoring simple Pagan ceremonies to meet an individual modern Witch's needs. Gardner's willingness to add existing religious beliefs from such diverse alternative sources as Spiritualism, the magic of Aleister Crowley, Charles Leland, Margaret Murray and Robert Graves (Adler, 1986, p. 64; Hutton, 1999, p. 238) was why his version cannot be considered a revival. Gardner's Witchcraft was an invented religion that contained a fragment of Witchcraft's past. As Bamberger (1997) explains, it was "formulated in response to the psychic needs of modern people cut off from older traditions by cultural repression, industrialization, education, loss of historical community and separation from nature." There was an increase in religious individualism as modern technology advanced and caused increased specialization in

the work force. In addition, modern education placed a high value on learning to think for oneself.

Weeks (2000) defines contemporary Western culture as one that is experiencing a "wholeness hunger." In order to feed the hunger, society experiences a reflexive spirituality, or as Weeks (2000) suggests, "deliberately cobbling together our own responses to the need for wholeness and encouraging others in similar efforts." Gardner pieced together his own beliefs in just such a manner. His willingness to pick and choose from other religions as well as to create his own religious practices was not a revival; rather, it was a new religious movement containing elements of many past traditions.

The term revival, however, was necessary for Gardner's religion because as Gergen (1991) states, "words are not mirror-like reflections of reality, but expressions of group convention. Various social groups possess preferred vocabularies, or ways of putting things, and these vocabularies reflect or defend their values, politics, and ways of life" (p. 119). The word revival was important for the religious movement because it implied an existing religion, and the ideal of this unbroken chain was important. Many people at the time, including some academics, also were claiming an unbroken line. The word revival allowed Wiccans to connect with historical events related to Witches in order to form a strong, common identity.

In his new religious movement, Gardner (1954) attempted to provide relevant answers to the seekers of his day. He firmly tied ritual magic and science to religion to

alleviate the pressures that rationalization and secularization had placed on mainstream religions. Gardner emphasized performing magic with reverence and always invoking the Goddess and God before performing magic. He believed that magic released the divine in each person. In other words, divinity may be found outside a person, but it is found within a person as well. Importantly, he went on to claim that magical practices were simply areas that science did not yet understand. Since magical practices were associated with the divine, science must be also. In addition, Gardner found the divine in nature as well, and he claimed that everything, including nature and humans, was interrelated (p. 83). There was no necessary conflict between magic and science in his view.

Gardner also sanctified sexuality and the human body. Since the Deities were within each person, then each body was also to be worshipped. He went on to sanctify sexual practices. Calling copulation the "Divine Rite," Gardner linked sex with potential magical energy, and thus to religion.

As there were three levels of initiation, it is clear there was some type of structured form, but anyone could go through all three initiations in one evening (Hutton, 1999, p. 229). These levels were supposedly based on a Witch's education in the religion. Although all practitioners were promised equality, women gained the ascendancy in Gardner's religion. Despite the fact that there were two figureheads, Gardner insisted that while a woman could take on the role of either a God or Goddess during the rites, a man could only be a God.

Gardner also had fixed opinions of who could set the rules of the religion. As Hutton (1999) reports, in 1957, Valiente grew increasingly upset over the attentions of the press. She and her coven attempted to draw up thirteen proposed rules for Witches that would ensure secrecy and consultation between the covens. Gardner immediately responded by sending Valiente his own set of "traditional" rules, which Valiente regarded as created by Gardner for the occasion. Many of the rules outlined subservience of the high priestesses to their "elder" (p. 249). While Gardner did not publish these rules, J. Bell (1977) claims to present a list of all of the set rules in Lady Sheba's Book of Shadows. The book contains 162 laws mainly promoting secretiveness to protect practitioners. It does, as Valiente asserts, marginalize women's positions within the religion. There can be little doubt that Gardner did not want any form of strictures placed upon his people, unless he created them.

Gardner's new religious movement did have some rules in place before Valiente's group met. The most important one related to punishment. In his Book of Shadows, Gardner said, "Order and discipline must be kept. A High Priest or Priestess may and should punish all faults to this end, and all of the Cult must accept such corrections willingly." He also added that if two people really could not get along, then one should leave and form another coven in order to avoid disputes. Gardner was in a hurry to spread his good news, so he really did not want anyone leaving his faith.

Through advertising and the publishing of his books, Gardner actively promoted the religion. The publicity, however, worked both ways for the new religious

movement. It did attract new converts; and, as Hutton (1999) reports, the papers did send on any initiation requests to Gardner, who had those interested initiated into the religion as quickly as possible. Gardner also encouraged new initiates to found their own covens as soon as possible in an attempt to spread the religion. Gardner feared that his religion would not survive without many new members, and he was already in his late sixties. The publicity, however, also hurt Wiccans. Hutton (1999) describes that it did not take long for the religion to be linked with Satanism in the minds of the public. Still, potential members soon outnumbered the members of Witchcraft available to initiate them into the religion (pp. 248-250).

An important member who Gardner initiated into the new religion was Raymond Buckland. Shortly thereafter in 1962, Buckland brought modern Witchcraft to America (Berger, 1999, p. 12; Guiley, 1999, p. 36; Oakwind & Harrow, 1989). Once in America, the religion would prove its remarkable adaptability as it responded to the same social factors as in England as well as new social factors in America.

From the very beginning, Gardner's Witchcraft revival stressed creativity and individualism among its members. In a society struggling with pluralism, industrialization, urbanization, alienation, rationalization and secularization, a new religion arose to meet the needs of those members of society who could no longer turn to Christianity for their answers. As the religion crossed the ocean to America, the emphasis on individuality would be taken to new extremes. When Buckland arrived in America, Wicca combined with other societal factors and became a wider cultural

movement. As Hutton (1999) emphasizes, "From the 1970s onward the United States…has been the world centre of modern Paganism, exerting the greatest influence over its development" (p. 340).

Chapter Three

Modern Wiccan Beliefs

When Raymond Buckland arrived in America with Gardnerian Witchcraft, the religion rapidly began to grow through a grass roots movement. Any inquiries about the religion that Gardner received from Americans were forwarded to Buckland, but the demand for initiations became so great that Buckland could not keep pace. Soon, others began performing initiations and forming their own covens; as a result of this rapid growth, there were only a few elements that Witches held in common, and the religion became even more individualized. Witchcraft was rapidly changing beyond Gardner's ideal. The religion also was renamed as more of Gardner's "myths" were deciphered. Many practitioners felt the word Witch inspired negative connotations for many people, so modern practitioners changed the name to Wicca, which means "to bend." According to Wiccans, the word Wicce is an Old English word (Neitz, 1990, p. 357). Fighting the bad reputation Witches had gained and desiring some rudimentary structure, American Wiccans began to collectively define their religion.

The definition of a Witch was not easily determined by the practitioners of the religion as there are only a few common elements that Wiccans held and still hold. All Wiccans professed to believe in the Wiccan Rede, which contains an ethical as well as a spiritual approach to the religion. In its simplest form, the Wiccan Rede states, "an' it harm none, do what thou wilt" (Buckland, 1999, p. 9). They also professed to believe in

the Three Fold Law of return—anything a Wiccan does will be returned to him or her three times (Buckland, 1999, p. 18). Other than those two principles, it was and is difficult to define Wiccan beliefs because of so many individualized beliefs. Further, there was not a single national organization that had the ability to speak for all members of Wicca.

Nevertheless, in April of 1974, Llewellyn Press, occult publishers, sponsored a meeting in Minneapolis to define a Wiccan. As the publisher of Llewellyn, Carl Weschcke, explained, "Witches felt that a common definition was necessary as a 'self-policing' mechanism 'to protect ourselves from misunderstanding brought about by those whose personal power trips have exposed all of us to ridicule and injury'" (in Adler, 1986, p. 99). It was also hoped that a common definition would help to mitigate some of the damage the media had inflicted upon Wicca's reputation when they identified Witches with Satanists (Adler, 1986, p. 99).

Many Wiccans chose not to participate in the meeting because they felt the very idea of a council to define the religion was too bureaucratic and implied a centralized authority that they could not accept. As one Wiccan remarked, the idea of the council was "trying to force us to join in an organization, and criticizing us for wanting our freedom and our belief in freedom....Let us not quarrel among ourselves. Leave us be and we shall do the same for you. Worship as you see best and allow us also the same right. This is the true Wiccan way" (in Adler, 1986, pp. 100-101).

The Council of American Witches did mandate a few principles of the religion despite the protests of some Wiccans. These principles are important because they reflect that Wiccans can act collectively; furthermore, as my research indicated, they are still the accepted "rules" of the religion. Of the thirteen principles, there is a mix of spiritual, magical and political beliefs. The Council of American Witches released their statement with a few prefacing remarks:

> The Council of American Witches finds it necessary to define modern Witchcraft in terms of the American experience and needs. We are not bound by traditions from other times and other cultures, and owe no allegiance to any person or power greater than the Divinity manifest through our own being. As American Witches we welcome and respect all Life Affirming teachings and traditions, and seek to learn from all and to share our learning within our Council. It is in this spirit of welcome and cooperation that we adopt these few principles of Wiccan belief. In seeking to be inclusive, we do not wish to open ourselves to the destruction of our group by those on self-serving power trips, or to philosophies and practices contradictory to those principles. In seeking to exclude those whose ways are contradictory to ours, we do not want to deny participation with us to any who are sincerely interested in our knowledge and beliefs, regardless of race, color, sex, age, national or cultural origins or sexual preference.
>
> 1. We practice Rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the Phases of the moon and the Seasonal Quarters and Cross Quarters.
> 2. We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with Nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment to life and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.
> 3. We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than that apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary, it is sometimes called 'supernatural,' but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.
> 4. We conceive of the Creative Power in the universe as manifesting through polarity—as masculine and feminine—and that this same

Creative Power lives in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supporting of the other. We value Sex as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magical practice and religious worship.

5. We recognize both outer worlds and inner, or psychological, worlds—sometimes known as the Spiritual World, the Collective Unconscious, the Inner Planes, etcs.—and we see in the interaction of these two dimensions the basis for paranormal phenomena and magical exercises. We neglect neither dimension for the other, seeing both as necessary for our fulfillment.
6. We do not recognize any authoritarian hierarchy, but do honor those who teach, respect those who share their greater knowledge and wisdom, and acknowledge those who have courageously given of themselves in leadership.
7. We see religion, magick [sic], and wisdom-in-living as being united in the way one views the world and lives within it—a worldview and philosophy of life which we identify as Witchcraft, the Wiccan Way.
8. Calling oneself "Witch" does not make a Witch—but neither does heredity itself, or the collecting of titles, degrees and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within him/herself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well, without harm to others, and in harmony with Nature.
9. We acknowledge that it is the affirmation and fulfillment of life, in a continuation of evolution and development of consciousness, that gives meaning to the Universe as we know it, and to our personal role within it.
10. Our only animosity toward Christianity, or toward any other religion or philosophy-of-life, is to the extent that its institutions have claimed to be "the only way" and have sought to deny freedom to others and to suppress other ways of religious practice and belief.
11. As American Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft; the origins of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present, and our future.
12. We do not accept the concept of "absolute evil," nor do we worship any entity known as "Satan" or "The Devil" as defined by the Christian tradition. We do not seek power through the suffering of others, nor do we accept the concept that personal benefit can only be derived by denial to another.
13. We acknowledge that we seek within Nature for that which is contributory to our health and well-being. (Adler, 1986, pp. 101-103)

Spiritual Beliefs

Principles one through seven as well as nine and thirteen are important because they deal directly with the practitioners' religious beliefs; and, these principles are what place Wicca into a religious category as they deal with the supernatural. Stark (1996) defines religions as "socially organized patterns of belief and practices that concern ultimate meaning and assume the existence of the supernatural" (p. 21). The spiritually based principles set forth by the council do meet the requirements of the definition; however, on the surface they may not appear to do so, as in the first tenet.

The first principle defines Wiccans' approach to ritual. The emphasis appears to be on the rituals rather than beliefs. The beliefs, however, may be found within the rituals. Sered (1994) offers the explanation, "an emphasis on ritual, however, does not mean…religions are simplistic…rituals may express very complex belief systems" (p. 121). In addition, rituals deepen practitioners' beliefs (Sered, 1994, p. 120). In this respect, Wicca closely resembles other religions.

Wiccans' rituals celebrate the phases of the seasons. The seasons celebrated are called sabbats (Berger, 1999, p. 18). The sabbats include Yule, Imbolc, Eostar, Beltane, Midsummer, Lughnasad, Mabon, and Samhain (Simms, 2000, p. 152-157). Wiccans typically refer to these as "the wheel of the year" (Starhawk, 1999, p. 197). Wiccan Starhawk (1999) describes the sabbats as "the eight points at which we connect the inner and the outer cycles: the interstices where the seasonal, the celestial, the

communal, the creative, and the personal all meet" (p. 197). During the sabbats, many Wiccans may come together to celebrate. Such was the case with the Wiccans I observed. Normally a small group, they joined several other groups to celebrate sabbats; as a result, the congregation was much larger than usual Wiccan groups.

The insistence on individuality versus the need for unity may also be seen in the size of the covens. The covens have anywhere between one and twenty worshipers, but some Witches prefer nine or thirteen members (Guiley, 1989, p. 73). Miller (1999) notes, "the fastest growing and largest churches in the world are cell-based." Since only one person is needed for a coven, an individual or a group can practice Witchcraft. Many Wiccans have practiced their religion both ways, but the multi-member or group covens hold the religion together. As John, one of my research subjects, explained, "Working within a coven allows you others to communicate with; gives you a support system; and can provide more of a structured learning environment" (personal communication, February 26, 2001). Others noted the benefits of group ritual. Ben, another subject from a local coven, emphasized solitary practice is preferable when the alternative is a "bad" group (personal communication, February 18, 2001); however, no definition of a "bad" group was given.

The group that I observed was extremely close. Such closeness suggests intimate relationships between the members; and, these relationships are necessary not only to bond the group together, but also to support each individual's beliefs. Like any other religion, the members of Wicca need other members around to reinforce each member's

own beliefs; however, by allowing individual practice, Wiccans accept many members into their religion who might not otherwise wish to be associated with the group. Unlike mainstream congregations, however, no one is allowed to be an observer. Everyone present is expected to participate in the rite.

All of the forty-two people in attendance at the Eostar sabbat participated. The Eostar sabbat is more commonly recognized as the Spring Equinox and occurs between March twentieth through the twenty-third. Wiccans believe that the sun God welcomes the Goddess back to life from the land of the dead during this rite. The Wiccans view the sabbat as a time of balance when light and dark are equal. Most Wiccans consider the sabbat as a time that encourages new beginnings (Susan, personal communication, March 16, 2001).

On the evening of March 16, 2001, I met the High Priestess of the small group I had been observing. Tonight was a special occasion as it was time for the Eostar sabbat, one of the eight big meetings the Wiccans hold in a year. It is held to commemorate the spring equinox, which in actuality would be March 21 of 2001. It was explained to me that because most Wiccans have careers that would prevent them from meeting during the week, they felt it was acceptable to celebrate the ritual a few days earlier when they could all be together. That night, my small group met with several covens to form a bigger group. The high priestess, Susan, explained to me that for the eight sabbats, they normally do meet in this manner. Susan requested that I ride with her to the larger meeting rather than driving by myself.

During the ride, Susan was clearly agitated. She was not sure if taking me to observe the larger group would be acceptable to the others. Susan said, "They just don't like outsiders or publicity. If they are not comfortable with your presence, we will have to leave." The conversation then switched to a reminder of the dos and don'ts surrounding my behavior. Susan reminded me to feel free to ask questions, but she asked me to keep an open mind about whatever would occur at the meeting. I was reminded not to ask to see anyone's Book of Shadows. If they offered to let me peruse a volume, then I could look; but, I would not be able to incorporate any of the material into my research as it was of such a personal nature.

Once we arrived, her anxieties were put to rest. We were meeting in a Unitarian-Universalist church. The church members allowed the Wiccans to use the building for their own services as long as they cleaned up the premises before leaving. The Wiccans were gathered in loose groups within the recreation hall. As we entered, Lily, the high priestess of all of the smaller groups, immediately welcomed me. Far from being opposed to publicity, Lily had several articles concerning Wiccans pinned up to the wall. She offered to assist my research efforts in any way that she could. I was advised to mingle and get to know the other members. Any of them would be happy to be interviewed, but I was not to tape or do any audio recordings during any of my interviews.

As I took in my surroundings, I did not feel out of place. I had been advised to dress nicely for the occasion, preferably in a dress. The other women present were

equally well dressed and among the forty-two people in attendance, the five men wore suits. A few of the younger, teenage members were wearing jeans. Several people commented on how nice each of the others looked, so appearance was important here.

In the small groups that I joined, the conversations varied. Some of the Wiccans were discussing previous meetings and rituals while others discussed events in their lives concerning work, school, or more personal issues. The volume in the room was quite deafening.

Lily called the meeting to order, and everyone present washed his or her hands in ceremonial water. They formed a loose, large circle. Crepe paper on the floor was used to mark the boundaries of the circle and the four elemental winds were called. As each elemental was called, we all turned to face in the direction from which it would be coming. Once this was done, we were ready to begin.

In the center of the circle, a small altar was set up. One large candle was in the middle, with many small candles around the circular table. A basket of eggs was also on the table. The high priestess began by welcoming everyone to the sabbat. The Goddess was called in many forms. We were then informed that Easter is really a Pagan holiday that had existed much longer than Christianity. It was a fertility celebration. Each year, the Goddess and the God came together. The God would die, but he would be reborn. We were warned that many participants at previous festivals had become pregnant despite modern birth control methods, as the energy the group raised was tremendous.

When Lily was through, we were each asked to enter the circle, light a candle, and tell of something that was ending in our lives and something that was beginning in our lives. For a few minutes, each participant was held in the light of the reflected candles as he or she voiced hopes, fears and dreams. The rest of the group asked questions and made encouraging comments. When it was my turn, I thanked the group for allowing me to attend. I then explained that I hoped my reading about Wiccans had formally ended, and the process of talking to Wiccans was beginning.

After we had done this for everyone present, squares of cloth were passed around with paint. We were asked to use the paint to draw some type of design, write down our religious affiliations as Pagan, and sign our names. Each individual cloth would then be sewn together with other groups' work so that it could be sent on to Washington. When I questioned why, I was told it was simply to let them know they exist.

Once all of the painting equipment was put away and the squares collected, we performed the famed spiral dance while chanting "The Goddess changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes." We then returned to our places in the circle, and the children present served our "feast" of bread and apple juice.

The ritual was over, and the elementals were dismissed. The crepe paper was removed, and we were on our way to a local restaurant for the true "feasting." When I seemed reluctant to go and eat, I was reminded that we had all just used a great deal of

our reserve energy. While we were feeling good now, we would feel badly later if we did not eat, as we still had quite a night ahead of us.

As we all ate, many discussions were going on at once. Lily, Susan, Mary and I sat together and discussed Wicca over the meal. I was asked to begin studying the religion, but I politely declined for private reasons. They seemed to respect my decision, although Lily, an older woman of the group, felt that I was just not ready to break out of society's set roles quite yet. "You will be though. When you are ready, we will be here."

As the group began to disperse, Lily informed me I was welcome to attend any other sabbats or functions the covens held. Around us, I heard other Wiccans making plans for the next weekend. The evening had officially ended, and most of the Wiccans appeared pleased with the sabbat they had performed.

In addition to the sabbats, Wiccans also celebrate esabats, which correspond to the three phases of the moon: new, full and waning (Berger, 1999, p. 18). Traditionally, esabats are the regular meetings of the coven, but some covens meet weekly. Many modern practitioners have begun to prefer the term circle for their weekly meetings. These meetings perform several functions: religious worship is held as well as magic and healing. Any business matters requiring attention are also addressed (Guiley, 1999, p. 112). Rituals and feasting are also performed at each circle (Starhawk, 1999, p. 191). The most famous ritual that has become known and is used in Wiccan circles is the ritual of drawing down the moon. When a female draws down the moon during the

ritual, the Goddess is pulled into the woman; and thus, she becomes the living embodiment of the Goddess (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, p. 158).

Each month also has a significant moon. For example, January's full moon is known as the Wolf Moon. It is seen as a special time of protection and strength. When I accompanied Wiccans on their spirit hunt, it was important to the Wiccans that they were under the influence of the Blood Moon, which could only aid them in achieving contact with the spiritual world. While any female may perform these special moon rites, many Wiccans firmly believe that a woman experiencing her menstrual cycle will be much more successful and powerful during the rites than a female who is not (Zimmermann & Gleason, 2000, pp. 160-164). This is interesting since in many religions, such as Judaism, women are regarded as ritually unclean when they are menstruating. The Wiccan view may be a deliberate repudiation of this barrier to women in other religions. It also allows all women to feel just as important and more important than any men in the group as Wiccan women are relegated to inclusive special status rather than exiled from their faith.

Rites of passage are also shared. Wiccans have created rites for each significant event in people's lives including "birth, maturation into adulthood, marriage or the joining of two or more adults in a relationship, croning and death" (Berger, 1999, p. 18). There are rites for divorce, entering retirement age and dying as well (Guiley, 1999, p. 279). It is interesting because most mainstream religions in America do not perform rites such as marking divorce or entering retirement. By publicly acknowledging a

divorce, the rite helps to mark a crucial change in a person's life and confirms that reality for others. The rites for aging, or "croning," are important for the same reason—they provide recognition of a serious change in life and a person's perspective.

There are personal rites as well. For example, there is a ritual for taking a new, magical name each time a person enters into a new life event (Berger, 1999, p. 19). Practitioners of Wicca actively recreate themselves with these name changes as the need arises. Such rites assist the individual and the group in altering their mind sets about the individual and his or her responsibilities in life.

All of the rituals can be created by individual groups or by a solitary Wiccan; however, the Wiccans agree on the overriding beliefs surrounding the sabbats and the esabats. There is unity but also diversity within their approach to sacred holidays. The rituals themselves are important because some core beliefs may be deciphered from the rituals. They believe the Goddess and the God unite to create a divine son. The God then dies and is born again as the son. The Goddess never dies. An everlasting renewal of life is the result and is a core belief. It also seems evident that Wiccans believe they are in control of their own lives as they have the ability to rid themselves of problems or fears through their rituals. Most importantly, they reflect the belief that the Goddess and God may be within a person—each person is divine.

The fourth principle is closely connected to the first as it explains the deity who Wiccans worship. Ultimately, there is only one supernatural being, but the deity is represented as a Goddess and a God to reflect the masculine and feminine polarity of

the one deity. They also believe that the deity exists in everyone. However, belief in a divine being is not a requirement for practitioners (Woodsong, 2000). It has been suggested by Roof (1993) that "today's spiritual quests are the working out of tendencies deeply rooted in an Emersonian conception of the individual who must find God in herself or himself" (p. 256). Seeing the deity as part of themselves, Wiccans are the seekers who view deity as part of every person and thus greatly individualized.

The practitioners believe that the Goddess has three forms—the maiden, the mother, and the crone, which correspond with the three phases of the moon when the esabats are performed (Neitz, 1990, p. 361). The maiden is associated with the waxing moon, as the moon and the maiden are both young. The mother represents the full moon indicating fertility. The waning moon is the embodiment of the crone, whose time is nearly finished. Some covens also recognize a fourth goddess, the enchantress. The new moon and any times the moon is obscured are the times of the enchantress (Grimassi, 2000, p. 91).

Some covens also recognize the God who is associated with the sun and is conceptualized as a trinity. One aspect of the God is the Horned One, representing the God of the Forest. The second side is the Hooded one, who is the Lord of the Harvest. The Old One is the third component and represents wisdom (Grimassi, 2000, p. 91).

Some covens also recognize a third God known as the Divine Child. As the seasons progress, the Divine Child matures into the God (Grimassi, 2000, p. 88). The

third God is not recognized in many covens as a distinct, separate entity from the God, but the third God does help link the three aspects of the Deity into a holy trinity.

The Goddess and the God's names are open to interpretation. No one name is given by an organized body, as each person may have his or her own names that he or she has borrowed from other religions or has created to address the Goddess and the God. Wiccans believe that no one name could encompass everyone's experience (Buckland, 1999, p. 15).

The Wiccan view of the deities is interesting because a Goddess/God is representative of each stage in a person's life. The multiple Goddesses and Gods allow Wiccans of all stages in adult life to readily identify with a corresponding figure. The recognition of the older Goddess and God also places a premium upon the older members of the group and recognizes their wisdom.

The ninth principle also defines Wiccan spirituality as it explains Wiccans' beliefs regarding death and deals with the ultimate questions surrounding existence. Most Wiccans believe in reincarnation. They accept that when someone dies, he or she will go to a place called Summerland for rest. When the individual is ready, he or she is then reborn. Of course, Summerland is different for each Wiccan (Grimassi, 2000, p. 126). Believing they are constantly reborn, Wiccans feel they gain more of an understanding of how all things are interconnected.

Magical Beliefs

Although traditionally not viewed as spiritual, principles three, five and part of the fourth are viewed by Wiccans as spiritual. These tenets deal with magic, and sociologists have consistently placed magical practices outside of the religious realm. As Malinowski (1969) explains, magic is practiced to achieve a specific end, but religion is an end in itself (in Hamilton, 1995, p. 157). Hegel (1969) makes the distinction a bit clearer in his analogy:

> There has been an inclination on the part of some…to consider prayer too as magic, because man seeks to make it effectual, not through mediation, but by starting direct from Spirit. The distinction here is that man appeals to an absolute will, for which even the individual or unit is an object of care, and which can either grant the prayer or not…. Magic, however…amounts to this, --that man has the mastery as he is in his natural state. (in Hamilton, 1995, p. 24)

Since Wiccans believe that the divine is within each individual and everything is interconnected, they do view their magical practices as calling upon a supernatural power within themselves. In addition, many magical acts, by the very nature of their performance, imply a belief in Spirituality; and by extension, life after death. The fifth principle, as stated, would not be possible without a spiritual world. Here, religion and magic coalesce. In order to differentiate their practices from the magic known as stage acts, Wiccans have changed the spelling of the word magic to magick (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, p. 194).

Wiccans believe that all people are capable of magick; however, most people are not aware of their ability (Berger, 1999, p. 19). Magick's most concise definition would

be to use the mind in conjunction with other spirits to alter situations or create situations (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, p. 194). Wiccan Simms (2000) defines magick as "creative visualization" (p. 78). For magickal workings, it is necessary that the conscious and subconscious mind work together. Rituals and spells, while not necessary for magickal practices, are conducive to focusing the two minds in unison (Simms, 2000, p. 79).

Wiccans use magick for a variety of purposes that involve different approaches. There is magickal healing, candle magick, poppets, cord magick, burning intents, dance, scrying, tarot, and protective magick. Most Wiccans also believe in astrology and Spiritualism (Simms, 2000, pp. 79-80). Wiccans also work with magickal colors, magickal alphabets, magickal symbols, magickal inscriptions, magickal clothing and jewelry. Most Wiccans believe that herbs and food have magickal properties, too. Some of the practitioners of the religion also work with crystals and stones (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, pp. 205-216).

The highest form of magick is known as the Great Rite, the symbolic union of the God and the Goddess. Some Wiccan rituals call for the union to be performed in a symbolic form, but the actual union of a man and a woman is also magickal because it produces a great amount of energy that may be directed to magickal workings. Gardner (1954) reinforced the sexual openness by establishing the practice of worshiping in the nude called skyclad (p. 20). Today, some Wiccans practice skyclad while others employ robes (Guiley, 1999, p. 374). The group I observed, however, worked in their regular

clothes. In addition, I never observed the Great Rite either literally or symbolically at any of the events I attended. The High Priestess of the larger meeting at Eostar, Lily, explained to me that due to younger children now being included in the religion, their coven no longer performs the rite openly. Practitioners may, of course, choose to do so privately (Lily, personal communication, March 16, 2001). As Wiccan Simms (2000) asserts, "Any rumors you may have heard about orgies at Witches' rituals are vastly over exaggerated" (p. 124). Another possibility for the phasing out of the Great Rite could be the fear of sexually transmitted diseases. With the threat of AIDS in our society, many Wiccans might be reluctant to participate in the rite.

Outside of the Great Rite, magickal practices can be conducted alone or with a group. The Wiccans I observed and interviewed all made it perfectly clear that the group experience held advantages. The largest advantage would be that since more people are involved, more magickal energy is raised in accordance with natural laws.

The Wiccans' practice and belief in magick reflect a definite postmodern leaning. Since science does not hold all of the answers to life's questions, Wiccans view magick as another way of controlling or understanding the world. To practitioners, it is possible that science has just not labeled properties that are now considered magickal (Cunningham, 1994, p. 20). In addition, Wiccans reinterpret past events in the light of their magickal knowledge (Berger, 1999, p. 20). When I was in the cornfield with the Wiccans, the dogs had been literally sent out by the new owners of Rose Winter's house. It was only later that the Wiccans reinterpreted their experience to be seen as a

sign from the spirits. The ability to reinterpret events clearly places Wicca into a postmodern categorization because it is in postmodernism where the lines of interpretation blur to allow a new view of events to be seen (Gergen, 1991, p. 119).

The need for unity versus the simultaneous emphasis placed on self-autonomy can be seen in Wiccans' magickal practices. While a solitary practitioner can and should employ magick, the group is capable of generating more magickal power than an individual. Susan, one of the Wiccans I interviewed, repeatedly stressed to me that the group has much more power than an individual (personal communication, March 13, 2001). By practicing magick in a group setting, individual beliefs are again reinforced. Bloch (1998) argued, "that magic, when practiced in a complex, industrialized society, also offers solidarity and shared values." This was the case with the group I observed. Because every member believes magickal practices are effective, they are able to stand as a group united within this belief. Whenever I observed the coven during magickal times, there was never any doubt displayed by any member that what they were attempting to do would succeed. Horton (1967, 1968, 1982) believes magical practices themselves are a search for unity (in Hamilton, 1995, p. 36). Durkheim thought, "When the…rituals are celebrated, men's thoughts are centered upon… 'their common beliefs'" (in Nesbit, 1974, p. 182). Their individual beliefs bond them into a group and reinforce what each individual member experiences.

Ethics and Political Beliefs

Whatever interpretation of events is made, Wiccans try to respond ethically. Wiccan ethics are embodied in principles two and thirteen that incorporate a moral view of the world. As Hamilton (1995) explains, religion many times does include ethical beliefs (p. 19). These principles declare a responsibility to ecological issues. Wiccan beliefs and practices center around nature's cycle, and they strongly feel the need to protect the environment to enable their own survival (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000, p.11). Calling themselves a nature religion, practitioners of Wicca lobby strongly for ecological issues.

The large number of feminists involved in the religion helps to keep Wiccans politically active for ecology and feminist issues. The feminists see the spiritual as political. Feminist Wiccan Z. Budapest (1980) asserts, "What people believe (faith-religion) is political because it influences their actions and because it is the vehicle by which a religion perpetuates a social system. Politics and religion are interdependent" (p. 3).

Feminists have had a great impact on Wicca. They are responsible for the strain of Wicca known as Dianic Wicca, restrictive female groups. Dianic Wicca evolved from the mixture of the feminist movement and Wicca. During the 1960s and the 1970s, feminists sought to gain more power and raise others' consciousness by creating or finding a feminist form of religion (Simms, 2000, p.37). Feminist Spirituality arose because some women desired distance from patriarchal forms of religion in order to

affirm their own spirituality. In many ways, feminist Spirituality reflected the ideals and structure of the feminist movement. Sered (1994) describes feminist Spirituality as a group without structure, dogma and common rituals. Instead, they emphasized each woman's individualized beliefs unique to her experience (p. 26). Eventually, some of these women identified themselves as Witches. As Sered (1994) concludes, "It is difficult to point to a particular group of women and call them 'Spiritual Feminists.' A large core of Spiritual Feminists identify themselves as Witches and belong to organized covens" (p. 27). Hutton (1999) concludes that the merger of Feminist Spirituality and Witches was inevitable because the Witch was one of the few symbols of power available to women (p. 34).

Radical feminist Peggy Dobbins also recognized the Witch as a power symbol. In 1968, she claimed the title of W.I.T.C.H. as an acronym for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. The group believed in achieving their goals through various means including hexing Wall Street and generating terror (W.I.T.C.H., 1970). In addition, these women strengthened the feminist movement by insisting that the persecution of Witches had been the legalized persecution of women. The link allowed the feminists to forge a common bond. Despite their contribution to the feminist movement, W.I.T.C.H. did not survive as a group. The lack of structure and organization, not uncommon in feminist movements, resulted in the disintegration of W.I.T.C.H. in 1969. It was not until 1971 that Wicca and feminism became inextricably

linked by the well-known feminist Wiccan Z. Budapest (Adler, 1986, p. 188; Guiley, 1999, p. 38; Hutton, 1999, p. 344).

Z. Budapest was born on January 30, 1940, in Budapest, Hungary. Witchcraft was a family tradition that Budapest carried on, making her a Hereditary Witch. Her mother believed in Spiritualism and was a practicing medium. She also influenced her daughter through her art. Many of her ceramic creations involved the Goddess. Budapest later recalled " 'playing priestess'" and creating her own rituals as a child (Guiley, 1999, p. 38).

Budapest arrived in America in 1959 to attend the University of Chicago. A few weeks later, she married her childhood sweetheart. The couple had two children before their divorce in 1970. Budapest then moved to California. Like many other women of her time, she was affected by several of the cultural factors that enabled the movement to exist. Lopata (1987) claims, "The Feminist Spirituality Movement...developed in a demographic climate of late marriage, frequent divorce, and single parent families in which the parent is almost always the mother (in Sered, 1994, p. 56). Drawn to the feminist cause, Budapest combined her Witchcraft heritage with her feminist beliefs to create a Goddess religion to refute critics of the movement who believed that "feminism was 'against God'" (Guiley, 1999, p. 38).

In 1971, Budapest and a few other women founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven; as a result, Dianic Wicca—groups of women only—came into existence (Adler, 1986, p. 188; Guiley, 1999, p. 38; Hutton, 1999, p. 344). The Dianic groups associated

strongly with Diana, the Goddess of the moon. Diana represented a woman who was "a free spirit, an achiever, who knows what she wants and scores the mark with a single arrow shot. She is neither dependent upon nor subjugated by men" (Guiley, 1999, p. 103). Budapest (1980) declared Wicca to be a women's religion (p. 3). This was problematic for the Wiccans because the traditional Witchcraft lore of Gerald Gardner required males and females for magical practices (Neitz, 1990, p. 363). In Dianic covens, the focus is on the balance of polarity (masculine and feminine) within each woman (Simms, 2000, p. 37). Feminists, who believed they were escaping patriarchal oppression, decided to place their focus on the polarity within each woman (Adler, 1986, p. 212); thus, they effectively removed the need for males in the group. Dianic groups are the most closed and far less is known about their functioning. Despite my acceptance into local Inclusive groups, for over a year, I could not even arrange a telephone conversation with a local Dianic group member. Inclusive group members eventually told me that I would never gain entrée to any Dianic group (personal communication, Susan, August 5, 2001). Further, I could identify no interactive, on-line Dianic groups.

In 1976, Z. Budapest brought the religion to national attention and gained some recognition of the fact that Wicca was a religion. Arrested for fortune telling in Los Angeles, California, she quickly linked feminism, Wicca and politics. Adler (1986) recalls, "Z. told me she regarded the trial as important to establish the right of women to define their own spirituality and to practice their own talents independent of religious

and behavioral codes set up by men" (p. 187). Adler (1986) went on to report that many Wiccans objected to the handling of the case as well as Budapest's trial slogan: " 'Hands off Wimmin's [sic] religion'" (p. 187). In the end, Budapest was convicted despite anthropologists and Wiccans who came to her defense (Adler, 1986, p. 187). Budapest, in her own way, brought Wicca to the status of a religion in the minds of many non-practitioners.

Recently, Wiccans have become increasingly political to protect themselves from religious discrimination. Many Wiccans suffer discrimination at their places of employment as well as experience problems with neighbors when their religious beliefs become public knowledge (Jorgensen & Russell, 1999). Current Wiccan reports allege "one lynching, one attempted mass murder by stoning, and numerous fire bombings, shootings, and assaults" (Wiccan news in the media, 2001). In response to these problems, Wiccan groups at the state level networked together to form W.A.R.D. (Witches Against Religious Discrimination) in 1990. In 1998, W.A.R.D. legally became a nonprofit organization on the national level. W.A.R.D.'s official goals as stated by the group are: "we actively work to educate the public and provide a greater understanding of what Witchcraft is. We deal with discrimination cases, promote nonviolence, and provide assistance to Witches and Pagans in need" (http://www.ward-hq.org/history/html). Current membership in W.A.R.D. includes Wiccans in thirty-three states (http://www.ward-hq.org/history/html). They have been supported in their efforts by the Organization for Religious Tolerance because as Joe Cook, an ACLU

representative, explained, if the organization does not support Wiccan rights, then Baptist and Catholic rights are at risk as well (Wiccan news in the media, 2001).

In 1999, Wiccans' rights were challenged in Texas where they had been holding religious ceremonies for Neo-Pagan soldiers stationed at Ft. Hood. Politicians such as Governor George W. Bush were incensed over the situation. The politicians found allies in many fundamentalist Christian groups. The Wiccan community stood up for their rights, and the struggle just died out (Wiccan news in the media, 2001).

Now that George W. Bush has become president of the United States, there has been growing anxiety among the practitioners of Wicca. Wiccans believe he has demonstrated his "membership with the 'religious reich,'" which many Wiccans have been taught to fear. As Wiccan Bonewits (1996) cautions, "the modern Protestants who call themselves by this term [Fundamentalists] are, in fact, the primary threat to our lives and freedom right now." Bonewits (1996) also warns against "Christian Reconstructionism" where local, state and national government offices would be taken over by Fundamentalists.

Wiccans are currently engaged in a major political drive. Once President Bush announced his "faith-based initiative," Wiccans rose in protest. In previous conflicts with President Bush when he was governor of Texas, Wiccans identified him as a strong opponent. Many non-supporters of the faith-based initiative, both Wiccan and non-Wiccan, believe the proposal will "allow publicly funded religious discrimination" (Jane, personal communication, June 27, 2001). They fear they will be overlooked

because they are a minority religion. During the Eostar sabbat that I attended, our painting session was designed to prevent the Pagan presence from being overlooked. Through the Internet, numerous postings, such as the one I received from the moderated discussion group "Green Witch in the Working" (2001), are advising Wiccans to send a postcard to Washington with the same information (Jane, personal communication, April 12, 2001). While they are a small group, they are hoping to impress Washington with their presence and are actively working together to achieve their goals.

Definitions of a Witch

In order for Wiccans to politically band together, a common definition of who they are was provided by several of the principles. Principles six, eight, and ten through twelve are important because they define what a Wiccan is and is not. Wiccans found it necessary to explain what and who they are because of the popular notions of a Witch believed and promoted by the mainstream culture.

When outsiders attempt to define Wicca, practitioners are quick to take offense. Jorgensen and Russell (1999) categorize Wicca as a New Age religion: a religion that has an open organizational framework, stresses religious individualism, has a realistic outlook on authority and practice, emphasizes experience and faith rather than dogma, contains a holistic view, and accepts other religions. Some Wiccans feel that the term New Age is highly insulting and vehemently deny the label (MacMorgan, 2000). The Wiccans associate the term New Age with derogatory attacks on their religion and

claim that the term implies a time "where militant lesbian vegans rule over men enslaved as breeders or sorcerers plot massive role-playing games to get inside children's minds" (MacMorgan, 2000). The term is offensive because it also denies the Wiccans the shared past that is necessary to bond the group together as well as denying the group a strong cultural narrative. By identifying the religion as analogous to a New Age religion, the connotation implied is that the religion is created from many beliefs and does not have its own past history. Viewing their religion as following a long tradition, Wiccans have a shared past or cultural narrative, which pulls them together as a unit where each individual can readily place him or herself as a member.

By not viewing themselves as "new" as in "New Age," Wiccans can lay claim to historical events that allow them to construct an identity shared by all Wiccans, a history in which "the burning times" serves as a defining cultural narrative. The burning times refer to the persecution of Witches, which swept through the world during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Pope Innocent VIII granted permission to Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger to persecute Witches. Kramer and Sprenger wrote The Malleus Malefircarum, also known as The Witch Hammer, in 1486. The book was a manual for persecuting Witches and it actually created the entity "witch." In the attempt by hierarchical Christianity to eliminate Witchcraft, Wiccans estimated that through the years nine million people were put to death, with the most common form of execution being burning (Guiley, 1999, p. 5, p. 220). Barstow (1994), however, presents a more realistic accounting of 200,000 accusations and 100,000 deaths (p. 22). It is interesting

to note that in the original edition of The Spiral Dance by Starhawk (1979), she, too, presents the figure as nine million. In the later anniversary publication (1989), however, she amends her total. Starhawk (1999) admits, "Actually, estimates range between a low of one hundred thousand and ...[nine million], which is probably high" (p. 232). The overblown numbers show an emphasis on the martyrdom and persecution of Witches that Wiccans emphasize in an attempt to present the religion as worth dying for if a practitioner must.

Barstow's (1994) further computations revealed that more women than men were targeted since eighty-five percent of those executed were women and eighty percent of all accusations were made against women (p. 23). Both Starhawk (1999) and Barstow (1994) claim that misogyny from Christianity's influence was a strong element at the time. Women were considered inherently evil. Once accused of Witchcraft, women were considered guilty. The burden of proving their innocence fell to themselves. Barstow felt, "these statistics are sufficient to document an intentional mass murder of women" (p. 26). Summers (1928), the editor of a more recent publication of the Malleus Maleficarum, further justifies the feminists' accusations of misogyny and mass murder. Summers (1928) remarks:

> Possibly what will seem even more amazing to modern readers is the misogynic trend of various passages, and these not of the briefest nor least pointed. However, exaggerated as these may be, I am not altogether certain that they will not prove a wholesome and needful antidote in this feministic age, when the sexes seem confounded, and it appears to be the chief object of many females to ape the man, an indecorum by which they not only divest themselves of such charm as they might boast, but

> lay themselves open to the sternest reprobation in the name of sanity and common-sense. (p. xxxix)

It is not surprising, therefore, that the early feminists were quick to claim kinship with these women who had suffered a collective trauma and to turn that trauma into a rallying cry.

Hutton (1999) traces the connection between the feminists and the burning times to W.I.T.C.H., which viewed the persecution as a war against feminists because "the religion had been served by the most courageous, aggressive, independent, and sexually liberated women in the populace" (p. 341). Hutton (1999) explains that the ideology was firmly placed through the writers Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin in the 1970s, but its roots went all the way back to the writings of Matilda Josyln Gage (p. 342). Gage published Woman, Church, and State in 1893. An outspoken proponent for women's rights in the United States, she was the first to make the link between the burning times and the repression of women, as well as being the first to claim that nine million Witches had been put to death (Hutton, 1999, p. 141).

Most Wiccans today regard the burning times as a narrative that bonds them together. Believing that others have suffered for their faith, Wiccans are able to band together. Most Wiccans do not believe that they are descendants of these burned Witches, but because they are drawn to share a past, they accept that the burning times are a narrative form that connects them. Wiccan Cunningham (1994) contends, "Wicca…is 'new.' It is not a revelation of ancient rituals handed down for thousands of years. This does not invalidate it" (xi). Some Wiccans, however, feel they are directly

related to the burned Witches since they believe that they are reborn into the same family eternally. This belief causes secrecy within the religion as a way of protecting Wiccans' bloodlines. Some Wiccans feel that the memory of past lives within the family stay with an individual when he or she is reborn; therefore, these Wiccans are the "true" descendents and "true" Witches (Grimassi, 2000, p. 117).

The secrecy surrounding the group also provides unity. As Bloch (1998) notes, "it would appear that the alternative spiritual social network finds solidarity in being something of a 'secret'" (p. 11). As I discovered during my research, outsiders have traditionally been frowned upon, and many Wiccans are reluctant to have outsiders present during circle, regardless of what they may or may not be doing at that particular meeting. Their reluctance shrouds the group in secrecy and provides a feeling of otherness to the group as a whole. There is a clear definition of those who belong and those who do not.

While Christianity repressed Witchcraft, popular fiction also frequently vilified Witches. In many fictionalized accounts, Witchcraft and the devil have been firmly linked due to Christianity's influence. In the mid-eighteen hundreds, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1835) described Witches in "Young Goodman Brown": "hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widow's weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep" (p. 209). As fictionalized by Hawthorne, all of these people were evil and had made pacts with the devil, an entity

modern Wiccans do not even recognize; however, the popular version had gained the ascendancy. Accordingly, Wiccans launched a national campaign to educate the public about what a Wiccan/Witch really believes.

Before Wiccans could define themselves, they needed to state principle ten, which reflects Wiccans' awareness of their pluralistic society, which Smith (1999) claims is crucial to defining a group (p. 97). Smith (1999) also argues two propositions that support the belief that the Wiccan principles are important:

> Proposition 1: The human drives for meaning and belonging are satisfied primarily by locating human selves within social groups that sustain distinctive, morally orienting collective identities.... Proposition 2: Social groups construct and maintain collective identities by drawing symbolic boundaries that create distinction between themselves and relevant outgroups. (pp. 90-91)

By defining the group in this manner, Wiccans help practitioners of the religion form a better grasp of their identities.

The sixth and tenth Wiccan tenets do not recognize leaders but honor those who educate and who have given their lives for the religion. They also state that Wiccans only bear animosity toward religions that claim to be the only path. These tenets clearly define the group both positively and negatively; however, the sixth principle goes a bit further. The group claims not to have an organized body, but it does believe in honoring their elders, especially those "*who have courageously given of themselves in leadership*" (Buckland, 1999, p. 9). The practitioners state who they are not and who they are, but they also imply that martyrs have suffered for the religion. The implication heightens Wiccans' awareness of other groups who might possibly harm a practitioner

of Wicca. Smith (1998) proposes, "Individuals and groups define their values and norms and evaluate their identities and actions in relation to specific, chosen reference groups; dissimilar and antagonistic out groups may serve as a negative reference group" (p. 104). The terms Wiccans have used to define themselves support Smith's assertion and help to explain why the Wiccans are employing martyrs in veiled wording in their belief statement.

The eighth, eleventh and twelfth principles set forth by the Council also defined what a Wiccan is and is not. The eighth principle defines what the title of Witch means to them while the eleventh principle states that they are not bothered by their lack of a past. The twelfth principle makes it clear that the lack of a past also includes any reference to Christianity. They go a bit further in their definition of who they are not to stress that Witches do not cause harm in order to combat their negative image derived from the media and folklore as well as to disassociate themselves from W.I.T.C.H. The eleventh principle refers to Wiccan history and avers that the history of the religion does not matter. Some practitioners, such as the group I observed, actively and self-consciously create their own religion, but many Wiccans need roots to justify their faith.

By asserting what a Wiccan is and is not, the American Council of Witches defined a Wiccan clearly for whoever is interested; however, as Smith (1998) points out, the principles do exclude people who do not accept them. While exclusion is sometimes viewed within the framework of a negative connotation by many of the practitioners of Wicca, it is sociologically necessary for an identifiable identity. They

also hoped to encourage religious tolerance of Wiccans by downplaying the negative images society had perpetuated. They were not able, however, to continue working as a single community. Once the rules were ratified, the council disbanded due to differences (Guiley, 1998, p. 70). Roof (1993) suggests the American "religious culture makes it possible to hold on to a religious identity while at the same time rejecting all close ties to the institution" (p. 257). The dissolution of the council is not surprising since many Wiccans do not keep strong ties with organizations (Bloch, 1998, p. 2).

The group did have an enduring impact. In their efforts for unity, Wiccan books today still promote and utilize the thirteen principles to explain the religion. Books written by Wiccan authors are built around and elaborate upon these principles. Drawing Down the Moon (Adler, 1986), Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft (Buckland, 1999), Living Wicca (Cunningham, 1993), Wicca for Men (Drew, 1998), The Wiccan Mysteries (Grimassi, 1997), The Witch's Circle (Simms, 2000), The Spiral Dance (Starhawk, 1999) and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Wicca and Witchcraft (Zimmerman & Gleason, 2000) all essentially recycle the same information in a generic form. Usually, there are small discussions concerning the various Wiccan groups and their differences as well; but, the focus is clearly the thirteen principles supplied by the council. While each of the books stressed individuality, they also collectively represent unity of core beliefs.

The paradox of individuality and unity is evident in many Wiccan beliefs; and yet, these two opposing forces do not seem to bother Wiccans. Wiccans can and do act

collectively when they need to, especially politically, because as a group, they have more in common than simply the religion. The feminists' influence on Wicca is reflected in Wicca's "grass roots" approach to politics. Their shared vocabulary such as "circle" and "magick," as well as holiday names and ritual terminology, provides common ground and helps to define their group in a pluralistic society. By defining themselves, the Wiccan religion became stronger as they could definitely say who they were not in reference to "out groups." Pluralism, within and without of the religion, helps Wicca survive in modern society. Even now, many of the thirteen principles are debated by Wiccans; but ultimately, they believe that each individual has the right to decide for him or herself.

Chapter Four

Demographics and Divisions in Modern Wicca

While the thirteen principles of the American Council of Witches provide a general, overreaching belief system for all Wiccans, there are other factors that also contribute to group unity. The current demographics of the religion's members provide a basis for unification as many Wiccans come from similar backgrounds and share similar lifestyles. The demographics and the loose, organizational roles in each of the groups provide commonalities that structure the religion.

Given the possible ramifications for publicly acknowledging their religion, it is difficult to gain an accurate count of Wiccans. Berger (1999) and Jorgensen and Russell (1999) estimate approximately 200,000 members of Wicca. Berger (1999) reports that the largest number of Wiccans is found on the West and East coasts, with 15.7% living in California and 7.6% living in Massachusetts (pp. 9-10). Stark (1996) proposes that new religious movements more commonly spread in the West than in any other geographical location in America (p. 26). Regardless of the state, the majority of Wiccans reside in urban or suburban locations (Berger, 1999, pp. 9-10), so few Wiccans are close to nature, i.e. actually live in undeveloped areas. This may either explain their stated desire to be closer to nature or represent more of an ideal than a genuine interest.

Many Wiccans' careers require them to settle in busy, metropolitan locations. Berger (1999) reports that most Wiccans are highly educated, white and members of the

middle-class (p. 8). She also notes that 65.4 percent held a college degree and 16.1 percent were in possession of postgraduate degrees (Berger, 1999, p.8). The study conducted by Jorgensen and Russell (1999) found that participants in the religion range from teenagers to retirees who hold many types of occupations. My field studies revealed a somewhat different population. The groups I observed were all white, ranged in age, from infant to retirees, and varied in employment, but unlike Berger's study, few in my local groups were highly educated and most would be categorized as middle to lower middle-class to working lower-class or as students.

While all of my Internet group appeared to be middle-class and did write as if educated, there is no way to verify their claims due to the anonymity the Internet provides. Except for the younger members of the group, they all claimed to have some form of higher education. The majority of the Internet group members were single but heterosexual. The main body of participants were females pursuing careers in fields where they still felt somewhat threatened because they were filling what have been viewed as traditional male occupations. In several cases, they traveled extensively and needed the group for stability. For example, "Daisy" often traveled between New York and London. She would inform the group when she was leaving and when to expect her back on-line ("Daisy," personal communication, April 10, 2001). The Internet coven allowed these people to form close, intimate relationships they could access at any time.

My local group and the larger group we met with for major sabbats were all white, but there were only two members in the larger group with higher education and

who were firmly upper middle-class. I would categorize the rest of the group as working lower class. Just as in Jorgensen and Russell's (1999) study, they held a variety of occupations. Two Wiccans were academics. Twelve of them were students in either graduate or undergraduate studies. Eleven percent of the group held undergraduate degrees. One third of the larger group was traditional college students, i.e., not older individuals returning to college later in life. Five of them considered themselves to be entrepreneurs like George, who owned his own landscaping firm. Three members of the groups classified themselves as housewives, and four other members found employment in factories. The remaining twelve members worked as bank tellers, secretaries and held various other low level clerical positions. Four of the Wiccans present were children, ages three, four, eight, and an infant. This information was tabulated through the use of questionnaires at a larger Wiccan sabbat meeting. Please see Table 4a.

Table 4a: Numerical distribution of Wiccan occupations:

Academics	2
Students	12
Clerical positions	12
Entrepreneurs	5
Factory workers	4
Housewives	3
Total	38

To enhance my observations and questionnaire, I conducted thirteen in-depth interviews. Nine women and four men were interviewed in person. They ranged in age from 18 to 65. Six of the 13 (46%) were age 26-35, a heavy weighting of the group and

representative of the larger coven of 38. The few males were even more heavily concentrated in the age cohort.

4b. Ages of Wiccans participating in interviews

	Age Ranges				
	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
Women	2	3	1	2	1
Men	--	3	--	--	1
Totals	2	6	1	2	2

They had been practicing members of Wicca for differing amounts of time, but nine of my interviewees claimed to have been Wiccans for 6 to 10 years. Two stated they had only been practicing 1 to 5 years; one had been a Wiccan between 11 and 20 years; and one claimed to have been a member of the religion for over 30 years. Please refer to table 4c.

Table 4c: Number of years participating in the Wiccan religion

	1-5 yrs.	6-10 yrs.	11-20 yrs.	Over 30 yrs.
Participating members	1	9	1	1

Most of them believed children should be raised in the religion, and all of them strongly believed individuals should determine the rules and the rites of the religion. There were only three married Wiccan couples, but none of the women interviewed

were lesbians. Two of the married couples were raising their children as Wiccans and those children were present at sabbat meetings. One of the married couples joined Wicca because their son had married into the religion. Interestingly, two of the older women I interviewed were also brought into the religion by their children. The majority of my interviewees were middle and lower middle-class. Two of them had college degrees and only one of them held a postgraduate degree. The summaries of the thirteen interviews follow, with the women presented first. Note: All participants were guaranteed personal anonymity, so no real names are used.

Lucy

Lucy is twenty-six years of age and has been a practicing Wiccan for seven years. One of the married members, Lucy, informed me that her husband had converted to the religion after they were married. Currently, they are raising their two children in the Wiccan religion. Lucy felt, "There is no way to live a magickal life and not have that influence them [her children], so we decided to just raise them in our beliefs and be very open and honest about everything" (personal communication, February 16, 2001). Their children, ages four and eight, normally do attend the sabbat meetings, but not her special Dianic events like the spirit hunt because Lucy sees this as valued time away from her family, as she is a full time homemaker. She described her childhood religion as Protestant, but her family did not attend church and spiritual beliefs were rarely discussed. She became interested in Wicca during her teenage years and decided to

convert to the religion. She met Susan, the leader of the group, through Susan's daughter, who is currently away from home while she completes her college education (Lucy, personal communication, February 16, 2001).

Jackie

Jackie is twenty-four years old and has been a Wiccan for eight years. Jackie also met group leader Susan through Susan's daughter. Jackie owns a business and is not married because she would prefer not to marry "outside of her faith" and has yet to meet the "perfect" male Wiccan. She does not have any children yet, but she thinks she will raise them as Wiccans if she ever does have any. Describing herself as a loner, she said she joined Wicca because she thought it would be fun, and she found the religion to be very similar to her family's Catholic beliefs. When she moved out of her parents' home, she also formally left behind the Catholic Church because she resented what she believed to be guilt that the religion had forced upon her. Jackie soon discovered the Wiccan religion required work as well as "fun," but she has become deeply committed to the religion and the answers it provides. "I really like that there is no judgment involved—you know, there's no heaven or hell, just Summerland. I had more than enough judgment growing up in a Catholic household. I also like that I get to be actively involved. Susan's really good at including all of us during circle or whatever" (Jackie, personal communication, April 29, 2001).

Carrie

Carrie is thirty years old and has been a Wiccan for two years. In contrast, Carrie is not so deeply committed to the Wiccan religion. Carrie is not married and has no children. She was not sure if she would raise any future progeny as Wiccans because she would have to make that decision with a future husband. Growing up, Carrie's mother and thus her children investigated many religions, but rarely stayed long at any church. Her mother indirectly led her to the Wiccan religion. Carrie is employed as a decorator by a retail chain and is often traveling. At home from one of her trips, she began reading books about Wicca that her mother had left lying around the house. Carrie came to the group through her mother's relationship with Susan, the group leader. Her mother no longer practices Wicca, but Carrie still enjoys getting together with the group when she is in town. Carrie remarked, "It's always a good time" (personal communication, March 22, 2001).

Donna

Donna, another member of the small group, is twenty-three years old and has been a Wiccan for nine years. She is deeply committed to the Wiccan religion, but her attendance at group activities is sporadic at best. Donna is employed at a local bank as a teller, and she is engaged to be married. She doubts that her fiancé will become involved in the religion because as she stated, "He's not really into any religion, but he doesn't care if I am" (Donna, personal communication, March 28, 2001). Raised in a

Protestant tradition, Donna came to the religion through a school project. "During my senior year in high school, we had to write a research paper. I chose Witchcraft as my topic because I thought it was neat. When I started reading books about Witchcraft, I knew I'd found the right path for myself" (Donna, personal communication, March 28, 2001). She prefers solitary practice of her religion because she believes that there will inevitably be conflict in any group, and she does not like the idea of a coven telling her what she can/cannot do. However, occasionally she likes to get together with other Wiccans who share her beliefs. Donna met Susan through other friends who were also interested in Wicca (Donna, personal communication, March 28, 2001).

Susan

Susan, the leader of the group, is also the oldest member of the local Wiccan group at age forty-one. She has been a Wiccan for six years. Currently, she is divorced and is attending college. Her daughter introduced her to Wicca. Susan's daughter called home from college to tell her mother that she had converted to the religion. Frightened for her daughter, Susan began to read anything she could find about the religion. She, too, soon converted. Susan said, "It just made so much more sense to me. However, I did not give up any of my previous beliefs. I could also be classified as a Buddhist and a Christian. I have sort of concocted my own system that makes sense to me. I do see Wicca as my major religion, though" (personal communication, February 15, 2001).

Before forming her own group, Susan was trained by Lily (Susan, personal communication, February 15, 2001).

Lily

At age fifty-two, Lily has been a Wiccan for fifteen years. She is an academic and has read extensively. She is divorced and has children, but she did not raise her children in the Wiccan faith because she was what she called a humanist. She said,

> I was raised Unitarian. The quest for my religious truth has always been a core sacrament of my religious and personal life. I have studied most of the world's belief systems and found points of resonance with many of them. I was very drawn to the polytheism of Hinduism, but couldn't identify with their Gods. I believe in the inner Divinity reflected in Buddhism, but find most Buddhist practice restricting.... Most of all, I could not live with a schism between what I know intellectually and what I believe theologically. So I spent most of my life as a Humanist although I was acutely aware of my desire for ritual expression of my spirituality. (Lily, personal communication, March 19, 2001)

Lily was also led to Wicca through her daughter. "When my daughter was in college, she learned that there were groups of people actively recreating these old religions. I had never associated the words Pagan or Witch with my beliefs, but when I started studying them, I discovered they were rebuilding religious practices based on observation of nature and the ancient pantheons" (Lily, personal communication, March, 19, 2001). She liked what she found, and she is currently the high priestess of her group (Lily, personal communication, March 19, 2001).

Marigold

Marigold is sixty-two years old and claims to have been a Wiccan for over thirty years. She said, "I can't remember a time when I wasn't a Wiccan" (Marigold, personal communication, March 19, 2001). She is a high priestess of her own coven, but she likes to attend the larger sabbat meetings held by Lily. She does believe children should be raised in the Wiccan religion, but she never had any of her own. "I was too busy trying to live my life I guess. It [children] was just one of those things I never got around to doing" (Marigold, personal communication, March 19, 2001). She was married briefly, but it did not last long as he was not interested in her religion or her career. She is actively involved with Wicca, and she likes to control her own rituals and rules. She does not want any more unification of Wicca than there already has been (Marigold, personal communication, March 19, 2001).

Meg

Meg is a member of Lily's coven and has been a Wiccan for eight years. She is fifty-five years old and was raised as a Unitarian. She is married, and her husband is a member of the coven. Her son is also a member of the coven. When her son married into the coven, he introduced his parents to the religion; and, they have been members ever since. Meg is glad that her grandchildren are being raised as Wiccans, and she thinks all Wiccan parents should bring their children up in their faith. If the children grow up and wish to leave the faith at that point, that is fine; but, they should have some

religious upbringing and why not Wicca? Meg is also a fierce proponent of the individualism in the religion. She likes expressing her creative side and thinks it is good for everyone to do so. Currently, she is not working; however, she spent many years as an administrative assistant to a CEO of a steel mill (Meg, personal communication, March 16, 2001).

Rose

Rose is twenty-seven years of age and has been a Wiccan for one year. She is a member of Lily's coven. Rose is also an administrative assistant. She has never been married. Since she is not married, she has not decided if she will raise her children as Wiccans. "There will be enough time to decide that later on. I've got to find the man first. Right now, I'm too busy having fun" (Rose, personal communication, March 19, 2001). Rose says she was touched by the Goddess and saw the light. She firmly believes that individuals should control their belief systems and not a national body. "I'm a newbie, though, so maybe I will change my mind after I've been involved for awhile. It's hard to say now, but I like the freedom I have with Wicca. No one is breathing down my neck to make me go to church, but I like to come to circle because every time is new and different" (Rose, personal communication, March 19, 2001).

Clearly, the relationships among the members have enabled the group to come together into a cohesive body. Also, many of these women expressed their preference for a religion that would allow them to experience active participation.

Of all the members of Wicca, Berger (1999) estimates that sixty-five to seventy-five percent are female (p. 40). Similar numbers also appeared in my research. At the larger group meetings, there were forty-two people present. Only five (12%) of them were male. Berger (1999) concludes that the focus on the Goddess and the feminist elements of the religion attract more women than men (p. 37). Such a pattern, however, is not unique to Wicca. Stark (1996) reports that women are the majority in religious practice across most churches and denominations (p. 25). Hunter and Sargeant (1993) point out that women have been responsible for many years for maintaining religion and insuring its growth.

It is not as easy to determine why males are drawn to Wicca; yet, Berger (1999) estimates 52,800 to 76,000 Wiccans are male (p. 40). Berger (1999) suggests that males join the religion to experiment with gender roles and come into contact with their more feminine sides (p. 41). Wicca for Men by Wiccan Drew (1998) proposes males are attracted by identification with the God as protector (p. 35). Berger (1999) expresses the opinion that some males might be interested in Wicca because they believe it to be a "sexy" religion (p. 46). The four males I interviewed did not necessarily agree with these views.

Hal

Hal is twenty-eight years of age and owns his own floral business. He finds working with nature's gifts to be uplifting. He has been a Wiccan for seven years and a member of Lily's group for four years. Asked why males join the religion, Hal told me, "I'm already wearing eye-liner, so I think I am already well aware of my feminine side" (personal communication, March 16, 2001). Hal was the only homosexual Wiccan present at the meeting, so his view is not representative of the entire male population of Wiccans. While Hal did not want to get too involved with detailing his past, he made it clear that he prefers the creativity and anti-authoritarian stance of Wicca. In addition, his sexual preference is not often welcomed into other religious groups. He has always felt like he had a place in the Wiccan religion. Interestingly, Hal does believe children should be raised as Wiccans. He believes the Wiccan community is already unified. "Sweetie," Hal said, "if someone tells you Wicca has no dogma, no central creed, or no theology, run as fast as you can. They obviously have no idea what they are talking about" (personal communication, March 16, 2001).

Allen

Allen also believed Wicca to be highly unified. He is sixty years old and is the husband of Meg. Their son married into the religion and brought them into it as well. Allen also believes that children should be raised in some religion, and he is proud of his son for raising his in the Wiccan religion. He does not think males join the religion

because it is a "sexy" religion. For Allen, Wicca provides answers to some tough questions he has struggled with all of his life: "Why do good people die? Why do really horrible events happen to innocent people? Why am I here? Wicca teaches us that each of us has a lesson to learn in life as well as a mission. My mission may be small, but it will affect everyone who comes into contact with me. I like that" (Allen, personal communication, March 16, 2001).

Leonard

Leonard, who is twenty-seven years of age, has been a Wiccan for nine years. He said he was brought to the path by doing a term paper for Anthropology. He liked what he researched, and he became a member of the group he studied. He has been with Lily's circle for five years. Currently unemployed, he prefers positions that allow him to use his brain. His most recent job was as a lab assistant at a local university. He does not think males join the religion because of any "sexy" connotations, but rather to celebrate a religion that upholds the feminine aspects of deity as well as the male (Leonard, personal communication, March 16, 2001).

Kyle

Kyle, also a member of Lily's coven, is twenty-five years of age and has been a Wiccan for six years. Kyle is an undergraduate student at a local university. Raised Unitarian, he changed his religion after reading the Principia Discordia. He does not

think most males join the religion because of "sexy" connotations, but "I suspect one of such attitudes. I don't much like him" (Kyle, personal communication, March 16, 2001). Kyle does believe there should be a national body that regulates the religion, but only as a disciplinary body when Wiccans "step out of line" (Kyle, personal communication, March 16, 2001). He does not want to give up any of the creativity he has found and liked in Wicca (Kyle, personal communication, March 16, 2001).

During my research, I raised the issue of why males are attracted to the Wiccan religion on Mother's Magic Net (2001), a closed, moderated, Wiccan discussion group. The questions I posted appeared as: "I have been researching the question of Wiccan males. It suggests that some males join Wicca because it is viewed as a "sexy" religion. Are there any males that you know about who might have joined for this reason? Why do males join the religion?" I received various responses, but the majority of males responded with statements that expressed dissatisfaction with other religions and Wicca "just felt right." Only two respondents verified that men might join because of Wicca's erotic reputation. I will call the two respondents "Bob" and "Fred" to protect their anonymity. Bob replied:

> I have heard from people who had little reason to be exaggerating, that such things have gone on, and there are people (both men and women, but it seems to be more men) who use it as an excuse for sexual freedom and/or bad behavior. So…yeah, it's out there. No, I don't think it's the only thing out there. Actually, I think that good, reliable, thoughtful Pagan men outnumber the ones who are using it as a tool to get them what they think they want. (personal communication, February 23, 2001)

Bob went on to give the reasons why he and, in his opinion, most men do join Wicca. "I think that some men do get attracted to Paganism in general due to a variety of reasons (different moral climate to a lot of mainstream America, somewhat clearer social rules in some ways, and a gender imbalance that generally favors men)" (Bob, personal communication, February 23, 2001). His response suggests that while some men join the religion because of its reputation for sexual opportunity, other reasons may include the chance to stand outside "normal" cultural behavior as well as the chance to live within the parameters of clear expectations that are missing from mainstream society.

Fred, another respondent, openly admitted that he joined Wicca because of the "sexy" connotations of the religion. Fred replied: "There is no doubt about the fact there can be sexual overtones in how men see female Witches. I have always had a thing for that type of woman, one that is involved in Witchcraft or the occult in general" (personal communication, February 12, 2001).

While men primarily seeking sexual partners may explore Wicca, they probably do not remain active members of the religion for very long. Berger (1999) discovered that men who were sexually offensive were quickly asked to leave (p. 46). Mike, another respondent, replied, "I think that a male or female for that matter that practices Wicca because it's 'sexy' doesn't practice it for very long...like any religion there is a lot of yourself that goes into it and doing it half-heartedly gets old after awhile" (personal communication, February 18, 2001).

My research, overall, indicated that many men become involved with Wicca due to dissatisfaction with their current religions. They felt more comfortable with Wiccans. My experience has shown Wiccans to be a warm, welcoming group. Such acceptance may be why some men think, "it just feels right." As Durkheim asserts, "The first effect of religious ceremonies is to put the group's members into action: 'to multiply the relations between them and to make them more intimate with one another'" (in Nesbit, 1974, p. 181).

Divisions in the Religion

Once a person becomes a practitioner of the religion, his or her group will belong to one of two wide categories: a Dianic or an Inclusive coven. Dianic covens are all female groups while Inclusive groups are comprised of both men and women (Berger, 1999, p. 13). Some Inclusive covens may have Dianic events with only the women participating, a modern women's night out. This was the case with the group that I observed. Normally, these Wiccans are an Inclusive group, but they do have Dianic evenings as well. Covens have extremely fluid boundaries that allow such variations.

While Wicca is a highly individualized religion, the two main divisions within the religion are easily recognized and provide a unifying structure to the religion as a whole. While moving away from structuralized religions, Wiccans have formed their own looser structure of Dianic and Inclusive groups.

Within the Inclusive branch, most of the covens have both male and female practitioners; however, not all covens have male members because female members outnumber males. This places a premium on male membership in individual Inclusive covens. Lily and Susan informed me that there is stiff competition among these covens for males. Males automatically raise the status of a coven, and their presence allegedly generates more power for magickal purposes (Lily and Susan, personal communications, March 16, 2001). This was interesting because Wicca has been viewed by some as a highly feminist form of religion. It may be so in Dianic groups, but not in the Inclusive groups that I observed.

Whether a coven is Dianic or Inclusive, each one is a congregation following its own traditions that are held in a Book of Shadows. The Book of Shadows contains the coven's traditions, the rules of the coven, the coven's ethics, beliefs, songs, rituals and spells. As a result, the religion looks slightly different in each group. Additionally, each person in the coven has his or her own Book of Shadows that each Wiccan creates for himself or herself. When a Wiccan dies, his or her Book of Shadows is to be burned. These books are not passed on to family members, who are supposed to create their own magickal records (Guiley, 1999, p. 33). Even though the group meets together, each member may have his or her own system; consequently, the only parts of the coven that provide unity are the group rituals involved and an overriding, general belief system.

The structure within the coven also provides cohesiveness. Inside each coven, a high priestess and /or a high priest lead(s) the group. They are responsible for

maintaining contact with other Wiccan leaders and sharing information between covens. In addition, these leaders plan gatherings and major rituals in terms of time, location, and the duties each member will perform at the events. They believe their most important role within the coven is to teach so others may advance within the religion until they are ready to form their own covens (Susan, personal communication, October 25, 2001).

There are several ways a Wiccan can advance in the religion. Many covens still employ the three degree system that originated with Gardner. Some Wiccans attend specialized institutions like American Wicca University to obtain the title of reverend. In the group I observed, members were taken through various steps to achieve "leadership" status within the religion. Susan clearly led Lucy through the last steps to her final third degree. For Lucy to advance, she had to plan and lead an event. Lucy chose to set up the spirit hunt, thus her hesitancy over creating a ritual "on the spot" in the cornfield. Susan was quick to reassure Lucy, and she smoothly led us through the rest of the evening. Her achievement led to her third degree; consequently, if Lucy wished to form her own coven, she was free to leave the group. She elected to stay with her current group at the present time (Lucy, personal communication, October 25, 2001).

Besides the leadership structure, there is spiritual structure. Whenever any circle meets for any purpose, the "Watchtowers" must be called. Susan explained that the Watchtowers were basically spirits representing the four elementals (earth, wind, fire,

and air) as well as the four directions (north, south, east, and west). They are "above" humans because they are called to "watch over and protect us" (Susan, personal communication, April 9, 2001). There are many other spirits throughout this world, but the ultimate is the Deity, who Wiccans see as the Goddess and God. They believe that through lessons learned during reincarnated lives, they will finally "be good enough" to become one with the Deity (Susan, personal communication, April 9, 2001).

Unity within the religion may be found in the participants' demographics and both the role and ritual structure of the religion. Strong relationships throughout the Wiccan community reinforce the religious members' allegiance. There are clear leadership roles and levels of attainment within Wicca, which have organized the religion. Power struggles over male members have not harmed covens; conversely, the power roles have caused many covens to act in concert to achieve their goals, as some magick requires males. For a group prizing personal independence, they have a loose but stable structure from which to act.

Chapter Five

Individualism and Unity within Wicca

Bloch (1998) notes that "current society often is characterized by a paradoxical strain between the need for self-autonomy and solidarity ties with others based on shared normative expectations" (p. 1). This is especially true of Wicca. Wiccan beliefs tend to highlight the importance of individualism in their religion. The high value placed on individualism in Wicca resonates with the larger culture and is a major reason some participants are attracted to the religion. Yet, like any religion, there is a need for unity in Wicca, especially when it comes to defining what Wicca is and what Wiccans believe. Wiccans actively discuss their dilemma in the hopes of gaining cohesiveness while allowing a creative, individual approach to the religion's practice.

It is because of a strong belief in individualism that Wiccans claim not to proselytize, yet Wicca is growing through strong relationship ties that are also unifying Wicca. In their minds, individuals must choose the path for themselves (Berger, 1999, p. 84; Everson, 1988, p.1). In addition, Wicca does not claim to be the only path to the God or Goddess (Cunningham, 1994, p. xv). Many practitioners sincerely believe that religious truth can only be decided by each individual (Bloch, 1998). The high value on individualism discourages Wiccans from attempting to force people to join Wicca. Further, Wiccans also have a more cautious approach to potential new members than many other religions. They actively screen out individuals they deem unlikely to join or

fit before allowing new people to attend Wiccan events or participate in on-line groups. This near universal screening process both protects continuous members and adds a mystique to the religion. Like all religions, they attempt to inform interested people about who they are and provide more specific information and guidance to those who want to know more, but they strongly oppose pressuring people to join.

Numerous web sites exist that explain Wicca to the novice, and other informative sources about the religion may be found in a variety of media. Wiccans are prolific writers who seem eager to share their good news. There are even on-line covens such as the "Coven of the Far Flung Net." A few Wiccans are also willing to speak at low-key conferences, which is how I connected with the group that I observed. With initiation no longer a requirement for participation, the Wiccans have made it much easier to join a coven. Before the loosening of Wiccan rules, initiation involved some type of ritual rebirth within the coven. While this is not now strictly required, there is still some type of ceremony. Usually after one year and one day since an initiate committed to the religion, covens have a ritual ceremony to mark the event and allow the initiate to publicly declare a new, magickal name such as Moonbeam, Windsong or Strong Bow (Susan, personal communication, March 16, 2001). These new, special religious names strongly contribute to group and Wiccan identity.

In addition, extensive networking on the Internet allows Wiccans to contact other members of the religion wherever they happen to be located. If all of the members of the current Internet coven agree, the person is allowed to join the coven. The initiate

must choose a name the rest of the group can address he or she as and must provide some type of introduction of him or herself.

Members of covens are usually attracted to the Wiccan religion because the covens allow them to develop their own belief systems. The paradox of individualism and unity holds the religion in a state of tension. It seems to be the close relationships of members that create the commitment level of Wiccans and overcome individual differences in beliefs. Wiccans frequently discuss what Wicca is and what it should be. The tensions that exist within the religion due to the emphasis on individuality have reached an all time high, yet do not seem to threaten the religion's existence or growth. As children are being brought into the faith, there has been a call for more unification of beliefs (Berger, 1999, p. 84). The very push for unification represents a threat to Wicca since to many practitioners the attractiveness of Wicca lies in its individualism, which reflects a larger social movement. The movement for unification of beliefs, rituals, and structure can be seen in other religions as well. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) explains the process by stating:

> At a certain point a group consisting of teacher and leaders emerges that seeks to channel and control the process.... The group can do this by defining an authoritative body of writings that is then canonized as the correct interpretation of the original divine revelation and distinguished from other writings, which are regarded either as heretical or of secondary authority.... The winning group declares itself the privileged line of true...interpretation. Thus a canon of Scripture is established. (p. 14)

The tension between the individual interpretation and practice versus the desire to standardize and unify the religion is well expressed by Fred Kniss who saw similar tensions in other faiths. He describes it as an issue of moral authority. Kniss feels:

> The location of moral authority concerns the standard one uses to discern the fundamental basis for ethical, religious, aesthetic, or epistemological standards.... Does one look primarily to individuals, to the individual's reason, experience, or intuition, something that may vary widely from one individual to the next? Or, does one look primarily to a collective source of some type? (in Olson & McKinney, 1997, p. 121)

Wiccans are currently experiencing sharp contradictions in their beliefs as they struggle with these issues in large part due to the self-autonomy the religion upholds, but the Wiccan children and the use of the Internet have brought the struggle to a level of vigorous discussion.

Some Wiccans believe that if everyone must find his or her own path, then children should not be raised as Wiccans (Berger, 1999, p. 4). Most Wiccan parents, however, wish to raise their children in their beliefs, even if they choose another religion as adults. Berger (1999) estimates that 82,600 children are being raised in Wiccan families (p. 83). As Berger points out, in order to raise children in the Wiccan faith, Wiccans must accept more routinization of rituals and a more unified religion rather than an individualized Wicca (p. 86) to ensure that Wiccan children will understand the basics of the religion and can agree on what it means to be a Wiccan.

The Impact of the Internet

The Internet provides Wiccans a chance to network and enables unification. Many websites exist for children such as "The Hidden Children" (http:www.geocities.com/innocent_devil666/index.html) and "The Meagan Stories" (Dyer, 1991). "The Meagan Stories" by Kathryn Dyer (1991) are designed for Wiccan children to learn about Wiccan holidays and Wicca in general. For example, "Meagan's Samhaine" tells the story of Meagan's first ritual as well as explains the ritual and reason behind the holiday (Dyer, 1991). The Internet also allows Wiccan parents to connect in order to discuss parenting issues. "The Witches' Voice" (http://www.witchvox.com) provides a forum referred to as "Pagan Parenting," and "Mother's Magic Pagan Community" (http://www.mothermagic.net.com) offers a forum known as "Parenting and Family Life."

"The Witches' Voice" (http://www.Witchvox.com) and "Mother's Magic Pagan Community" (http://www.mothersmagic.net.com) also enable networking and communication solely for adults. On "The Witches' Voice," (http://www.Witchvox.com), it has been estimated that over the course of one hour the site generally receives 9,900 visits from Internet users. The editors of the on-line news letter "Pagan Perspectives" claim that through the use of polls, they have discovered that ninety-five percent of Wiccans are on-line (Jung, 2001). Here, they share spells and rituals, discuss current events and debate different issues pertaining to moral authority. The Internet community also provides extended networking to assist a Wiccan

anywhere in America to locate and join other Wiccans. These Internet sites are in actuality thriving communities where access to other Wiccans may be instantaneous. As one Wiccan pointed out, "Make no doubt about it, we are already a community on-line." (Jung, 2001).

In screened, moderated discussion groups on the Internet like "Green Witch in the Working" (2001), Wiccans discuss matters concerning moral authority, but they also share spells, rituals, send reminders of laws and historical dates in addition to whatever concerns they wish to share. It is like a brokerage house where information is freely shared rather than bought and sold.

Friendships on the Internet are quickly formed through the use of humor and shared religious identity. Wiccans stress play and fun, but many of them are serious and committed to the religion. During my own research, I was informed over and over again of the importance of laughter and enjoyment at all times, whether participating in a ritual or not. This was also evident in the groups that I observed. At each meeting, there was always joking and laughter. Durkheim observes, "'representative rites,'... 'sometimes even go so far as to have the outward appearance of a recreation: the assistants may be seen laughing and amusing themselves openly'" (in Nisbet, 1974, pp. 182-183). The appeal to light heartedness is not unique to Wicca, and it does not mean the practitioners take their beliefs lightly as many of these practitioners, who are extremely committed, place their religious commitments above their careers (Berger,

1999, p. 15). A great deal of time may be involved in an on-line discussion group alone; during a single day, I can receive more than fifty e-mails from this one on-line group.

The on-line community "Green Witch in the Working" (2001) also displays caring for its members. When one of the young teenage Wiccans asked what type of herbs were used to induce an abortion during the nineteenth century, there was an immediate supportive response. Everyone wanted to help if she had an unplanned pregnancy; but as has been the norm with the group when questions/problems arise concerning teens and physical problems, everyone stepped back to allow medically trained members, a physician and a psychiatrist, to respond first. She was not chastised in any way; and, eventually she received the answers she was seeking, but first she had to explain and reassure the entire group that she only desired the information for educational purposes and was not pregnant (personal communications, April 19, 2001). Through such sharing of personal issues on the Internet, Wiccans are bonding together and more unification has been facilitated. Even without there being a single authoritative council that decides what Wicca is, a taken-for-granted common identity emerges out of the conversations over the Internet and is visible in the similarity of content in the many books that one can buy that describe Wicca. A general cohesiveness has arisen out of the fact that Wiccans in widespread locations are communicating regularly with one another.

Many Wiccans are attempting to stop any such uniformity. As Wiccan Skytoucher (2000) pleads, they "must avoid the temptation to encourage a unified,

strong Paganism." Some practitioners feel strongly that if they cannot find a ritual to suit their needs, they should be able to create one (Cunningham, 1994, p. 23), such as the group I observed. The website "Keep Wicca Traditional Ribbon Campaign" (http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/square/72901) represents those leaders resisting increased, centralized authority, which they see as a watering down of the core beliefs and practices of the past. These Wiccans feel, "Wicca has gone from a definable set of practices, a secret society and a sacred priesthood to a fluffy bunny, sugar and flowers hodge-podge of Pagan practices. Wicca has gone from a discipline to a feel-good opiate for the people" (http: www.geocities.com/SoHo/square/72901). When asked to define "traditional" Wicca, these Wiccans advise, "You're a seeker. Try seeking" (http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/square/72901). This small group inside the community is dismayed with the proliferation of beliefs being proffered under the umbrella of Wicca. They are even attempting a revival to bring the religion back to the "true tenets."

Some practitioners believe that a split has already occurred, and they have reclaimed the title of Witch. They define Witchcraft as "a nature oriented religion with a God and a Goddess. When Christianity came to Europe, those who chose to follow the native religions were called Witches" ("Witches", 2001). Conversely, the "Witches" (2001) define Wicca as "formed by Gerald Brosseau Gardner." The "Witches" (2001) claim they are not against Wiccans. They simply view the Wiccans as a different, separate religion. They believe Wicca has more structure—the three degrees—than

traditional Witchcraft ever did. Wicca's rituals have more structure, and an initiate's progress is much slower than in Witchcraft. Wiccans also believe in the tenet "Harm none." Witches practice both "good" and "bad" magic. They are not ethically burdened concerning their magic. Wiccan Artisson (2000) argues, "Wicca has many 'new age' concepts within its canon that simply have no place in the historical or cultural context of European old Craft." Artisson is associated with the Wiccans who are vocally differentiating themselves from Witches.

While some of their views are extreme, many Wiccans do need the individuality promoted by the religion. The primary coven where I gathered my research felt strongly about their individuality. Out of the thirteen interviews I conducted, all thirteen felt moral authority should be placed with the individual; however, eleven of the interviewees also believed children should be raised within the faith. During our interview, Wiccan Lily explained, "I was nine years old when I realized I could not accept the revealed dogma of the Biblical religions and will not begin to accept another's religious authority now.... No national body could possibly regulate our rites and practices without losing much of the meaning for the individualized practitioner" (personal communication, March 23, 2001). Lily values her self-autonomy and will not willingly give in to unification of belief and authority; however, she later remarked:

> There are many issues common to all Pagans for which there are national organizations providing advice and services. I was recently at a conference with such Pagan notables as Andras Arthen, Selena Fox, Amber K., Isaac Bonewits, Jerrie Hildebrand, Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, Pete Pathfinder Davis, and Macha Nightmare. These people, representing organizations of vastly different rites and practices,

> willingly and enthusiastically cooperate on issues of clerical training, legal status, First Amendment rights, outreach, funding, and chaplaincy work. (Lily, personal communication, March 23, 2001)

While the Wiccans are struggling with their need for self-autonomy, some of them have been able to work together on common issues.

Wiccans battle with the problem on-line at the "The Witches' Voice" (http://www.Witchvox.com/). Calling the situation "Witch Wars," they actively explore the situation through articles. Wiccan Fritz Jung (2001) defines Witch Wars as "rivalry groups taking up sides based on what 'they' deem as THE valid path for the modern Witch." As Wiccan Walker (2001) elaborates, "Now that people know who we are NOT, maybe it is time to start thinking about who we ARE. But, who are we? The questions about Pagan identity and its core values seem to be the fuel of many a Witch War." Many Wiccans feel that while the American Council of Witches provided a wonderful definition of who they were not, they did not provide a solid enough basis for what a Witch is. They feel they need a further definition.

Most of the articles recognize the problems in the community and urge the acceptance of change—change in the form of a centralized dogma that will be reflective of the religion. In the article "How to Stop Whining and Learn to Embrace Change," Wiccan Walker (2001) asserts:

> This is not to say that traditional values should all be thrown out the window.... Changes will come. But changes built on traditional values will have lasting effects. Traditional values have taken a bad media rap because of the term's adoption by the Far Right to push its agenda back to the 'way things were.' Well, we know things were probably never really like that at all. There was probably no past Utopian matriarchal

> society of peaceful Pagans any more than there was a 'perfect' society in the 1950's. But one thing the Far Right DOES know—People want a spiritual 'vision' and they will make one up if they have to.

This act of creation is the heart of Wicca, but many Wiccans such as Walker (2001) feel they must act now in terms of unification or they will lose members as their community is fragmented. As Wiccan Jung (2001) insists, "The pioneers of the modern Craft have given us much to work with and it's critical that this information is not lost."

Several of the articles encourage members to be active participants. If they are not participating in the discussion regarding the Witch Wars, then their views will not count. Everyone must stand up and be accounted for as in a true democracy. As Wiccan Walker (2001) warns, "There will always be those who choose to remain outside the community for one reason or another. Some feel they are too individualistic to fit in....That's their choice! But if you are one who decides that you are not willing to be involved and work on your local community, then you forfeit your right to criticize. No citizenship, no vote!" In order to define who they are, Wiccans must all have a voice in keeping with Wiccans' abhorrence of a dictatorial body. Wiccan Simmons (2001) also promotes the individualized response that is required: "We can't reap the benefits of community unless we simultaneously contribute to it." The Wiccans are hoping that they can affect change with a bottom up strategy because then each person has been allowed a voice in the proceedings; however, if that strategy does not work, some Wiccans are ready for a central authority, not just for a definition, but also as a means of control.

"The Witches' Voice" (http://www.Witchvox.com/) asked, "What are the boundaries? Wherein lies accountability?" The overwhelming response concluded that the Wiccan community does need boundaries. As Wiccan Walker (2001) explains, "Right now, we have no where to go. We have no mediators, no facilitators and no widespread core values to depend upon. Someone gets away with it.... Surely we can come up with a better way to deal with our internal conflicts than this." The need is there, but whether or not Wiccans can accept it and actively achieve it remains to be seen. Wiccan Elizabeth proposes, "something along the lines of the Better Business Bureau, where individuals report to the Bureau their 'personal' experiences, good AND bad, and the groups are rated accordingly" (What are the boundaries, 2001). They can all agree that something is needed, but exactly what, and how to address it remains undefined.

Whatever appellation the central group receives, the authoritative body itself is not enough. Jim argues, "The answer to your question is that we should have boundaries and we should enforce the rules when those boundaries are crossed. The problem is that it is impossible to enforce a law when the law has no backing"(What are the boundaries, 2001). Many Wiccans feel that the laws of Karma will deal with each individual; therefore, they do not need a centralized authority. They are especially resistive because a centralized body would mean leaders (What are the boundaries, 2001).

Some Wiccans, however, are attracted to the idea of a leader. Jim explains, "Many feel that if we elect leaders of this type we are giving up some of our freedoms. I

believe that. A little more reorganization will bring more good than harm" (Who or what is a Pagan leader, 2001). Some Wiccans propose more than just a leader such as Serena who thinks, "I feel that groups of individuals should take up a role as a spokesperson or representative, and that there should be local, regional, national, and international persons.... I do not want a 'leader' meaning a person who sets dogma, rules, or guidelines, but rather a representative with whom to turn with concerns or issues" (Who or what is a Pagan leader, 2001). However, the existence of a core group and a leader or "representative" would ultimately need to wrest some moral authority to enforce whatever rules are decided upon by the majority. A member of the group staging the revival answered the question regarding leaders by declaring, "I guess it would be a good idea...maybe...if...you're a Wiccan. When you're weak minded and have no will of your own...you need a leader. I believe if you're a true Pagan you have your own path to follow, not one of a leader" (Who or what is a Pagan leader, 2001). Wiccan Skytoucher (2000) predicts the destruction of the religion if a governing group were elected. Skytoucher (2001) warns, "no exoteric [sic] priesthood must be allowed to gain preeminence over the path." With the majority understanding the need for some form of leaders, Wiccans have slowly started the process of forming as one large body. They are not quite ready for a leader as yet because as Wiccan Brian observes, "Before we can have leaders on the national or international scale, we need a new model of a structure which they can lead without shackling those they are leading" (Who or what is a Pagan leader, 2001).

Working towards forming a leadership body, many Wiccan articles stress the importance of compromise. They do not want to lose their individuality, but members realize that in order for the group to function politically and consistently for future generations, they must be able to act as one body. These articles also suggest methods of coping with group conflict so that win/win situations result (Jung, 2001; Walker, 2001). Web sites such as "All One Wicca" (http://www.home.att.net/~macmorgan_design/) have become common.

"All One Wicca" (http://www.home.att.net/~macmorgan_design/) is an attempt to bring different groups within the religion together by agreeing on certain overriding beliefs. This is done by describing themselves as eclectic Wiccans. As the Church of Universal Eclectic Wicca (2001) describes, "Universal Eclectic Wicca.... is a religious belief that allows for the existence of truth in a multitude of places. Eclectism is the practice of taking from many places." The web site "All one Wicca" (http://www.home.att.net/~macmorgan_design/) promotes those beliefs, and they have a coven on-line for those who wish to participate. The "Coven of the Far Flung Net" is a virtual coven that first appeared in 1998. They offer on-line lessons about the faith, so anyone who is remotely interested can begin practice privately. The anonymity involved often attracts many members who later might join regular covens. In a very real sense, these web sites are laying the basis for the unification movement by allowing Wiccans to share their beliefs, rituals, and specific teachings.

While the need for a more formalized structure and defined set of core beliefs are straining the group, Berger (1999) believes that it will increase the number of Wiccans in the long term and allow their religion to survive. Wicca has adapted and is adapting its form as the world enters the twenty-first century. As Roof (1993) contends, "America's institutions, including the religious, are adaptive institutions; they absorb and accommodate cultural changes with remarkable resilience" (p. 259). The religion will not die out, but there will now be "hereditary" Witches. At ceremonies that I witnessed, three year olds who were also participating served the traditional "feast" of bread and wine. Children have been the leading factor in the movement toward a more standardized religion, but the needs of adult Wiccans for some sort of structure and governing body have also promoted formalizing Wicca. The Witch Wars are likely to continue and increase in intensity as a strong segment advances structure and defined core beliefs.

While still a highly individualized religion, some aspects do provide unity to the Wiccan community. While problems with moral authority are occurring in the community at present, whatever centralized creed or central governing body that is developed will still stress individuality while establishing a general belief system that will serve to provide some constancy for the religion. Wiccans' pluralistic beliefs within a general belief system have served to make these individuals extremely committed to their religion. Many of these practitioners spend a great deal of time and effort involved in their religion. It is through the individual efforts that Wiccans find unity. The

pluralism within the religion is misleading to outsiders. Pluralism has been viewed by some as contributing to the downfall of religion, but in Wicca it has actually strengthened the religion because it causes members to become much more committed to a religion they have personalized, within broad religious guidelines. The intimate relationships Wiccans form also strengthen the religion by promoting tolerance of differing beliefs in order to sustain those relationships. While pluralism appears to contradict unity, in fact it creates unity around that value.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Wicca is a religion that was created by Gerald Gardner in response to the cultural factors of his time. Once in America, Wicca continued to grow and adapt to meet the needs of individual Wiccans. Despite their emphasis on individuality, I have argued that the group has been able to fashion and enforce a collective identity of who they are not, and there is some unity in their community. They are now actively defining who they are through the Witch Wars being staged primarily on-line. Wicca continues to provide spiritual answers to practitioners that are relevant in a modern, pluralistic and secularized society.

Wicca provides those answers through a loosely structured, organized framework within the religion. While the structure is in place, it is up to the individuals who practice the religion to personalize and create their own belief system extending from that structure. Contrary to other studies, my studies did show levels of organization within the religion. Interestingly, men have a high premium among the females within the covens. I think that the males' status has been elevated as a direct response to the backlash the feminist movement has endured, but I am sure that it also has to do with the scarcity of men in the religion. Participants are still adapting Wicca to meet modern needs.

Bruce (1999) argues that secularism will cause a decrease in the impact of religious institutions on governments and individuals will come to view religion as an activity that they may either choose or not choose to pursue as the need arises. Furthermore, pluralism will destroy religion since all religious "truths" will be open to evaluation. The ability to draw on pluralistic traditions is one of the strengths in Wicca.

The high emphasis on individuality within Wicca does not make Wicca a scattered religion without unity; on the contrary, it creates the potential for the religion to become a powerful force in the 21st century. Instead of the demise of religion, pluralism has enabled stronger commitments to the religions individuals do choose. As my research indicated, Wicca is growing from an elite membership of wealthy, highly educated individuals to a broader range, including middle and lower middle class members who are not as educated or as wealthy.

I do not believe that the Witch wars will cause that much damage to the religion. I do believe a group of Wiccans may break away and write a formal theology, but in many ways I think this has already occurred through the Internet. Current literature available about Wicca has already developed a general belief structure that members of the religion have agreed to share with the public. The Witches, who insist on their rights to an unstructured religion, will continue to do their individualized version of the religion.

In addition to allowing fierce discussions over theology, I believe that the highly intimate personal relationships that develop in the local coven and the on-line coven are

a critical factor in its attraction and the commitment that results. These relationships cement members' commitment level to the religion. In addition, these relationships encourage tolerance for diverse views within the religion, as long as those views fall under the generally accepted and practiced guidelines of Wicca.

The high degree of college students in Wicca reflects a growing trend on the part of college students to be seekers not only in their educations, but in their religious lives as well. The initiates from this group are also strengthening the religion as they encourage their family members to also become members of their local covens.

As America moves into the 21st century, Wicca will grow to be a strong, more unified religion. The Wiccans' tenets coalesce to create a religion that will survive with ever increasing pluralism and secularization. I believe it is possible that individualized, eclectic religions like Wicca may remain attractive in the 21st century because they are more adaptable and more capable of winning the support of people in a culture where individualism, not centralized authority, is more highly valued. Pluralistic beliefs within a loose structure may become the norm for other religions as well as more active participation. As other people learn about Wicca and become more tolerant of divergent views, the unified Wicca may enter into the mainstream of American culture. The individualized Wiccans will continue to offer another path.

Afterward

Wiccans have been greatly impacted by the terrorist attacks on America that occurred on September 11, 2001. They have united as never before in their history. Witch Wars are forgotten, or at least temporarily put aside. Both at the local level and the international level on the Internet, there has been an amazing response.

One of the crucial differences between Witches and Wiccans was over the use of "good" and "bad" magic. Since the attack, there has been international and local concurrence over the use of "bad" magic. While Wiccans earlier proclaimed their beliefs as being against any form of negativity, they have now revoked such sentiments. All of them, both Wiccans and Witches, have been participating in spells to at least stop what they term "evil doers" before any more attacks can occur.

Immediately following the attacks, there was an international outpouring of sympathy for America. Wiccans and Witches banded together on the Internet to discuss their shock and grief. Practitioners outside of America expressed their willingness to do whatever they could to assist the American members of their religion. Within two days, a strategy was developed that would require active "bad" magic and "good" magic.

The first strategy involved Wiccans worldwide coordinating their efforts to practice "bad" magic at midnight for nine nights. The "bad" magic involved binding the terrorists, so they could not perform any other nefarious acts. Not a word was heard from Wiccans who previously might have quailed at interfering with individuals' free will. The "bad" magic commenced without a murmur of protest.

The local coven I observed also participated in this magic. Because I was not a full member and "who knew what could come from 'bad' magic," it was thought best that I refrain from observing their actions. However, I was updated daily on how the rituals went and whether they felt they were being successful. Being Wiccans, they were not sure of the "black" magic, but they thought with international Wiccan cooperation they would be able to stop any further aggressions against the United States or any nations that supported the United States. I worked as a sounding post for my Wiccan informants regarding their fears in utilizing this new form of magick and to reassure them that they were responding as best as they could.

As soon as the nine days of Wiccan "aggression" ended, nine days of "healing" began. The healing was directed toward all the victims who were killed by the terrorists and their families. Wiccans were concerned over the sudden departure of so many souls at one time. They hoped to direct them toward Summerland because they felt that many of them would be confused at the sudden cessation of life. Again, all magick was conducted on an international level at midnight, the traditional Witch's hour.

The sudden accord between the Witches and the Wiccans has accelerated a sense of unity. They are now openly discussing a written theology, a definitive text that would still be loose enough to be individually interpreted. Coalitions of high priestesses and high priests are arranging international meetings to solidify the union within Wicca and Witchcraft.

I believe a continuing revival of Witchcraft is underway, not only in America, but also within the developed countries. Many Wiccans have come to the front and sacrificed ethical beliefs in order to practice "black" magick, but they feel that it is for the best of all. Witches who had felt estranged from their community are now in great demand because they allegedly understand the technicalities of manipulating "bad" magick. Many are returning to the predominant body of their religion. Others who may have been only on the sidelines watching or dabbling in Witchcraft through the Internet are now active participants. They have publicly declared themselves as Witches or Wiccans and have participated in the magickal workings directed against terrorism. Parents who were refraining from exposing their children to Wicca have brought them into the religion, and adult children have also begun pulling their parents and siblings into the movement.

I thought before the events of September eleventh that Wicca was beginning to spread, to trickle down to the lower middle classes and to have more exposure to a broader range of people. Clearly, Wicca is growing and providing answers its practitioners find meaningful during a dark time in history. Wiccans provide answers to awful events for them that other religions are not offering: the belief that they can work Magick to stop terrorism gives Wiccan practitioners an ability to control or prevent further evil. The Wiccan interpretation of the terrorist attacks is: the people who died were here for a specific purpose and all of us have learned and been touched by their

lives. Now, they are in Summerland, but they are not gone. They will be reborn when the time is right.

Virtually all religious groups have reported an upsurge in spirituality since the attacks. American society from the federal government to individuals seems to be responding with greater unity and decreased conflict. The response of Wiccans is directly reflecting these same, larger trends.

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CURRICULUM VITAE
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EDUCATION

- Indiana University at South Bend, Masters Degree in Liberal Arts, 2001. Graduated with 3.9 g.p.a. on 4.0 scale. Additional graduate certification in English, expected December, 2001.
- Indiana University at South Bend, B.A. in English, 1994.
- Clay High School, South Bend, Indiana, Diploma, 1986.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Ivy Tech State College, South Bend, Indiana

Position: Adjunct Instructor, Fall, 1994 to present. Courses taught include Freshman Composition and Basic Reading and Writing.

- Ivy Tech State College, Elkhart, Indiana

Position: Adjunct Instructor, Fall, 1998 to present. Courses taught include Freshman Composition, Basic Reading and Writing, College Success Skills, Researching and Life Skills

Note: Have taught four to six courses per semester and four to six summer courses from 1998 to present, usually split between the two campuses.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Member, Portfolio Board, Ivy Tech State College, South Bend campus, 1997 to present.
  Review written work of all students enrolled in English classes as a basis for passing their courses.
- Member, Portfolio Board, Ivy Tech State College, Elkhart campus, 1998 to present.
  Review written work of all students enrolled in English classes as a basis for passing their courses.

- Member, Regional Development Committee of Basic Skills Course, Ivy Tech State College. The board is composed of members of multi-universities, including Notre Dame, St. Mary's, Indiana University, Southwest Michigan College, and Ivy Tech State College. Responsible for designing optimal basic skills courses including study strategies, learning how to conduct research and life skills.

RELATED EXPERIENCE: Librarian, Mishawaka Public Library, Mishawaka, Indiana, 1993 to 1994. Freelance reporter for the SouthBend Tribune, Fall 1994.

ADDITIONAL EDUCATION

"The Internet Classroom." A one day seminar designed to promote creating Internet classes. Ivy Tech State College, South Bend, Spring, 2001.

AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL INTEREST: Victorian literature, 19th Century American literature, classic Greek literature and the contemporary novel.

LANGUAGES: Written and spoken French.

RESEARCH SKILLS:

- Microsoft Word, Works and Windows 98
- Internet, intranet and e-mail
- Field research experience for masters thesis
- Extensive experience with various databases such as EBSCOHost and University library databases.

PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES:

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